# 2013
# UC Student Sustainability Survey

Dr Matt Morris, Sustainability Advocate, UC Sustainability Office, October 2013

## Introduction and Methods

The 2013 survey was distributed as an on-line survey to all current UC students on Wednesday 25th September. The link was contained in an email sent from the Director of Learning Resources, Alex Hanlon. The link was active for one week. A reminder notice was sent out to all students via Juice on Tuesday 1 October, and a UCSA Facebook post promoted the survey on Wednesday 2 October. 795 responses were received. The survey asked ten questions and, unlike the 2012 (n=1,057) survey (but like the 2011 survey, n=300) it also asked about specific sustainability initiatives on campus. In other respects, the questions were the same as in 2012.

In reassessing the survey, a slight change was made to one of the Likert scales to make it consistent with other questions which may have affected the comparability of that question (see below, College's performance). However, the results broadly confirm the findings from the 2012 survey, again indicating a strong level of student interest in sustainability and a desire to see a stronger sustainability focus at UC.

Where possible, comparisons have been made including the 2011 results of the pilot survey.[1] Due to changes to the pilot questions, many of the 2011 results have not been included in this analysis.

## Who took the survey?

We asked student respondents to identify the college in which they spend most of their time. 27% were from Science, 20% from Arts, 25% from Engineering, 10% from Business and Economics, 9% from Education, 5% from Law and 3% reported 'other'.[2] When reading results providing a breakdown by college, disparities in this result should be taken into account.

## UC students try to live sustainably

We asked students to self-report on the extent to which they have taken steps to live more sustainably, and 56% of students said that they had taken some steps in this direction (no change). A further 25% said they take many practical actions to be more sustainable (a 2% increase over 2012). These results are similar to the findings in 2012.

[1] See '2012 UC Student Sustainability Survey' results for an explanation about comparability: http://www.sustain.canterbury.ac.nz/documents/2012_sust_survey_results.pdf

[2] The merger of the School of Law with the College of Business and Economics was not factored into this survey in order to keep the results comparable.

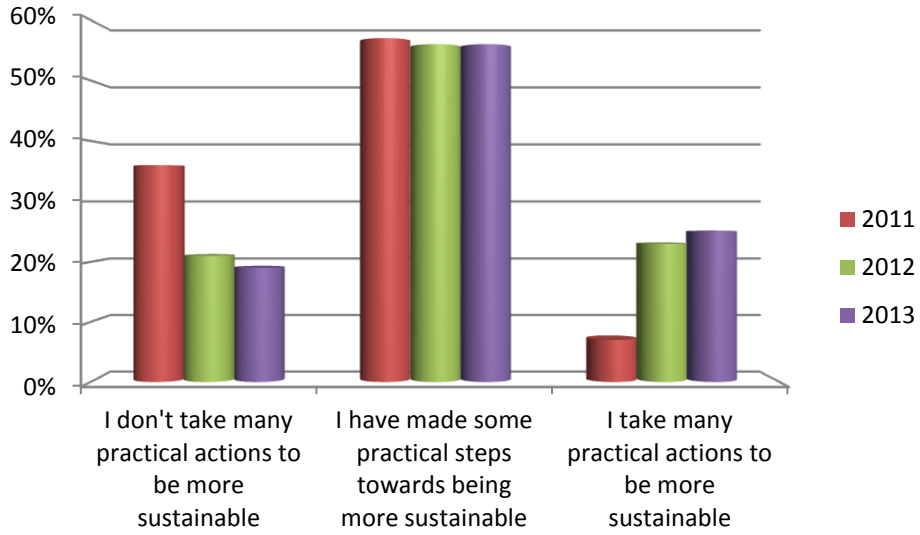


**Figure 1: Level of sustainable practice amongst students in their personal lives, 2011-2013**

## Knowledge of sustainable practice is important for future employment

66% of students reported that they believe that knowledge of sustainable practice will be important or very important for their employment prospects in the near future (up 5% over 2012), while 22% believe that this will not be important for them.

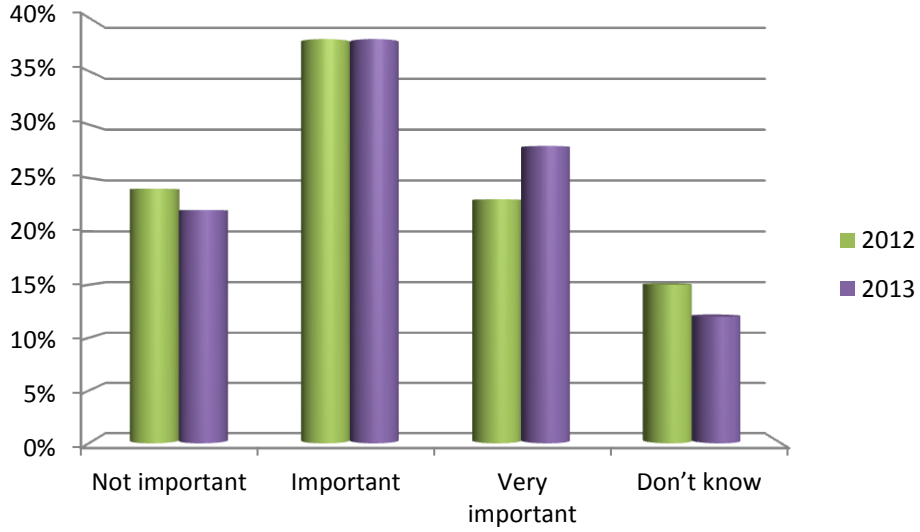


**Figure 2: Relative importance of knowledge of sustainable practice for future employment, 2012-2013**

Those students who most felt that knowledge of sustainable practice would be important for employment in the near future were Education students (82%), Law (76%) and Engineering (70%).

## Sustainability a growing deal-maker for choosing UC as a place of study

Since 2012 UC has begun including a small amount of sustainability messaging in its promotional material. Although still only a small component of this material, 21% of students reported that these credentials were either important or very important in choosing UC as a place to study (up 2%). 67% said it was not

important to their decision to study at UC (down 4%), unsurprising given that these credentials are not widely known.

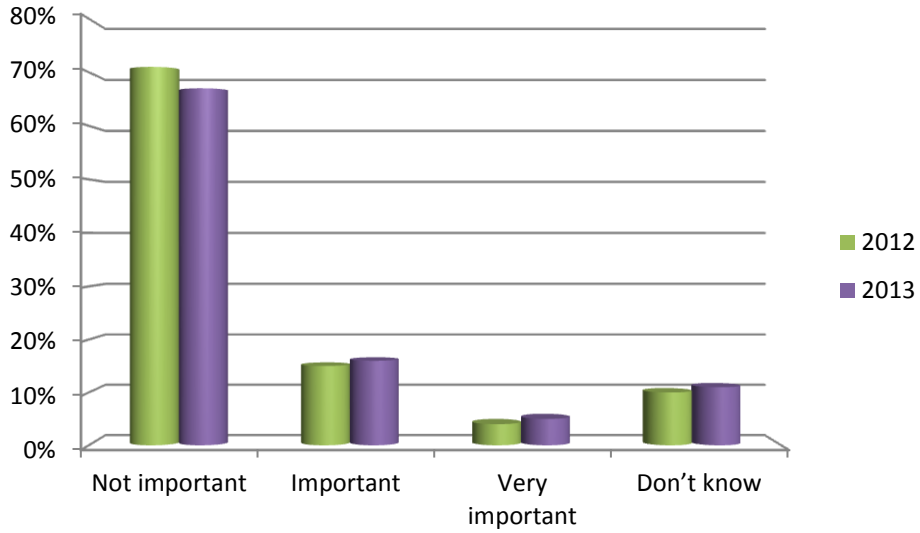


**Figure 3: Relative importance of UC's sustainability credentials in choosing to study here, 2012-2013**

## Sustainability is an important feature of current study and research at UC

61% of students reported that sustainability was part of, or strongly connected to their research or studies (up 5%), with a further 5% saying they intended to do some sustainability studies or research in the future (no change). 34% of students said that their research or studies did not cover sustainability (down 6%).

There were no changes in the Likert scale for this question, and the results are very similar across the three years (Figure 4). The most significant difference was that the numbers of students engaged in studies or research with a strong focus on sustainability have increased from 8% in 2011 to 17% in 2013.

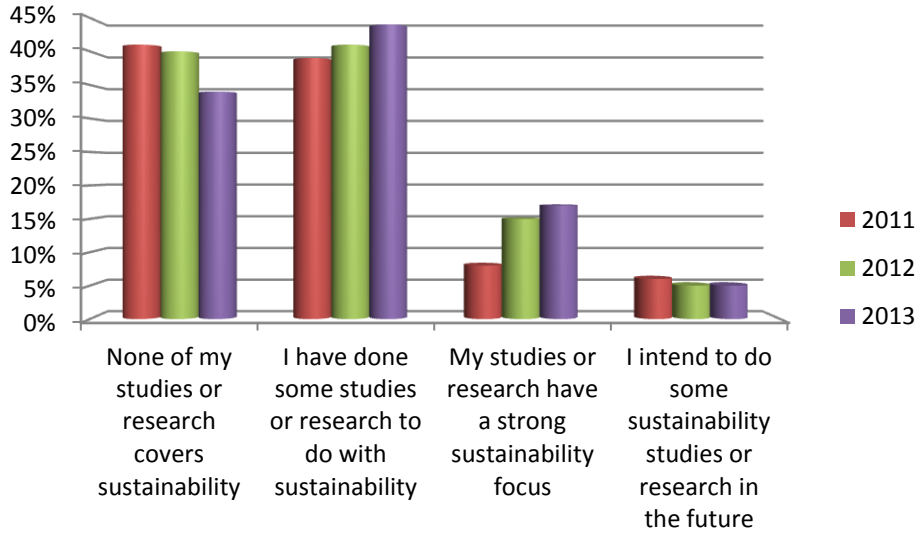


**Figure 4: Amount of sustainability content currently in courses or research, 2011-2013**

## Students would prefer a stronger focus on sustainability in their research or studies

We asked if students would like a stronger sustainability focus in their studies or research (Figure 5). In 2013, 45% of students said they would prefer a stronger focus on sustainability in their research or studies (up 6%). When this is broken down by college the results are interesting, and quite different from 2012. 56% of Law students would like a stronger sustainability focus to their studies (up from second place by 15%; while in 2012 Engineering students expressed the strongest desire for more sustainability in their studies, at 42%). Education students, who didn't figure in this section in 2012, were second in 2013 at 54%, followed by Science (47%, up 9% on 2012).

The proportion of students who said 'no' to this question dropped from 33% in 2012 to 28% in 2013. 33% of Engineering students said 'no', followed by Business and Economics students (32%, down 6%) and Science (30%). Arts students were the most uncertain in 2013, with 29% saying 'don't know', followed very closely by Education students (28%). In 2012 Education students were the most uncertain at 32%.

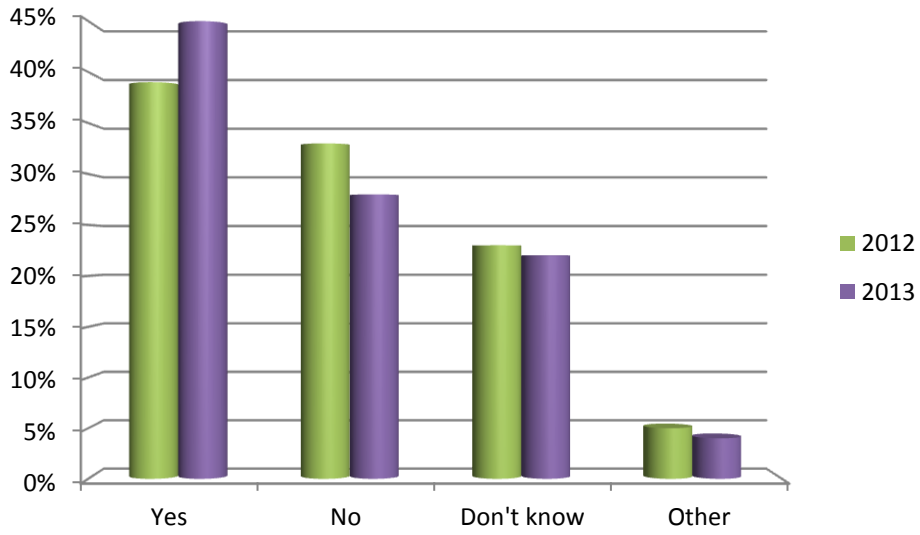


**Figure 5: Interest amongst students in a stronger sustainability focus to their studies or research, 2012-2013**

In assessing the breakdown of this answer it may be useful to remember that Education and Law students represented the smallest proportions of respondents, at 9% and 5% respectively.

## Students see UC doing well in its sustainability performance

Despite seemingly not knowing much about UC's sustainability credentials when choosing to study here, 40% of students thought that the university's progress on sustainability was good (up 4%), and a further 5% thought it was strong (up 2%). 10% felt it was terrible or weak (down 5%). 26% had no strong feelings either way (down 1%) and 18% simply didn't know (down 2%).

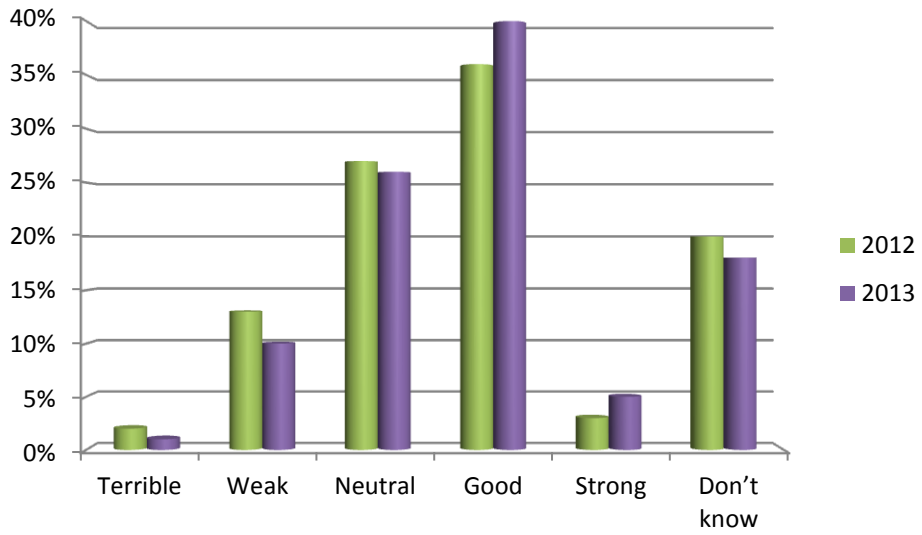


**Figure 6: Beliefs about the University of Canterbury's progress on sustainability, 2012-2013**

## Student thoughts on the sustainability performance of their colleges becoming clearer

When asked about their college's performance on sustainability, the result is certainly clearer than in 2012. In 2012 60% had reported a neutral feeling about this, whereas in 2013 this number had diminished to 37%.

However, while opinions on this sharpened, the difference was slightly more negative than positive. In 2013, 46% responded that they thought their college performance on sustainability was 'good' or 'strong' (compared to 2012 when only 32% reported that they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'), an increase of 14%. But those feeling that their college's performance was 'terrible' or 'weak' were 17% (compared to only 8% in 2012), an increase of 15%. Overall, opinions on the performance of colleges were still generally favourable.

Here the Likert scale was changed to bring the categories into line with the preceding question. In 2012 the question had asked how 'satisfied' students were with their college's performance, and it is possible that the slight change in wording accounts for the different result.

However, transposing the new categories onto the old for comparative purposes, and grouping together the 'terrible' and 'weak' categories, the students with the worst impression of their College's performance on sustainability in 2013 were Law students (40%), compared with 2012 where the most dissatisfied students were Education students (at only 16%). They were followed again by Arts students, at 29% (up 19% on 2012). Grouping together the 'good' and 'strong' categories, the students with the best impression of their College's performance in 2013 were Education students (a staggering 72%), followed by Science (51%, up 17% on 2012) and Engineering (44%, up 6% on 2012).

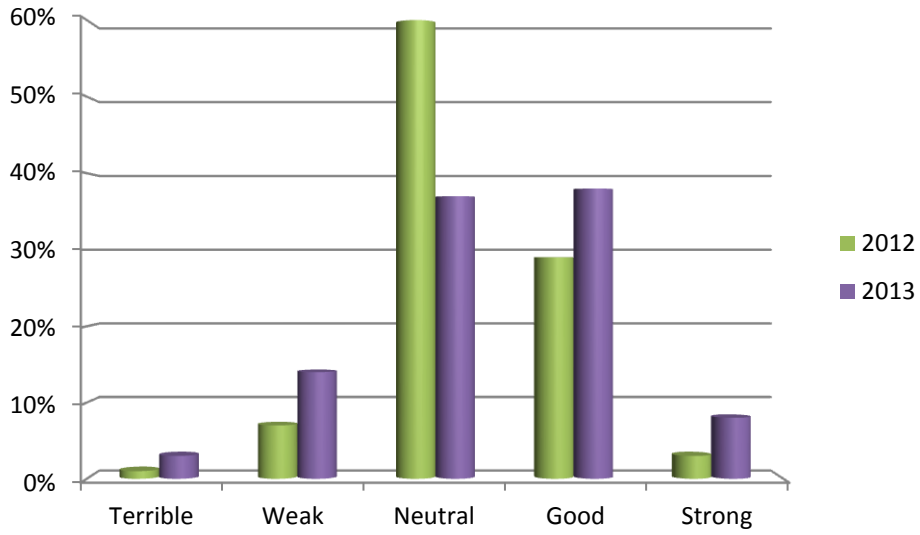


**Figure 7: Beliefs about College's progress on Sustainability, 2012-2013**

## Awareness of on-campus sustainability initiatives has grown

The 2011 trial survey asked students to rate their awareness of a variety of on-campus sustainability initiatives (Figure 8). This was not repeated in 2012, but we asked the question again in 2013 (Figure 9). It appears overall that awareness of the selected initiatives is improving. In 2013 'Fair Trade' was added to the list of initiatives.

Leaving Fair Trade out of the equation for the moment, the proportion of respondents who reported that they had 'never heard of' each initiative dropped over the two samples from 49% to 32%. Those who reported that they had 'heard of but not used or participated' increased from 42% of the total to 50%. Those who reported that they were 'aware of and have actively used or participated' rose from 10% to 18%. It appears, then, that active involvement in the selected sustainability initiatives has increased significantly since 2011.

In 2013, the most active use of or participation in a sustainability project was recycling, at 65% (compared with 48% in 2011), followed by Fair Trade (41%) and cycling initiatives (20%, compared with 8% in 2011). Eco My Flat was the initiative most people had heard about without actively participating, at 71%. This repeated the 2011 result (69%). This was followed by the community gardens (67%; up 27% on 2011), and Eco Week (58%; up 3% on 2011).

Overall, the picture is of both increasing awareness of sustainability projects, along with increasing participation. In terms of the second category, which simply asks about awareness but not participation, growth occurred against all indicators (except recycling, which had a lot more people actively involved), with the largest increases in awareness being the community gardens (up 27%), stream restoration (up 16%) and the Eco Office programme (up 15%). Active participation or use of projects also increased against all indicators, especially in recycling (up 16%), Eco Week (up 12%), cycling initiatives (up 12%) and community gardens (up 8%). This corroborates the above findings regarding student perceptions of the University's overall performance around sustainability.

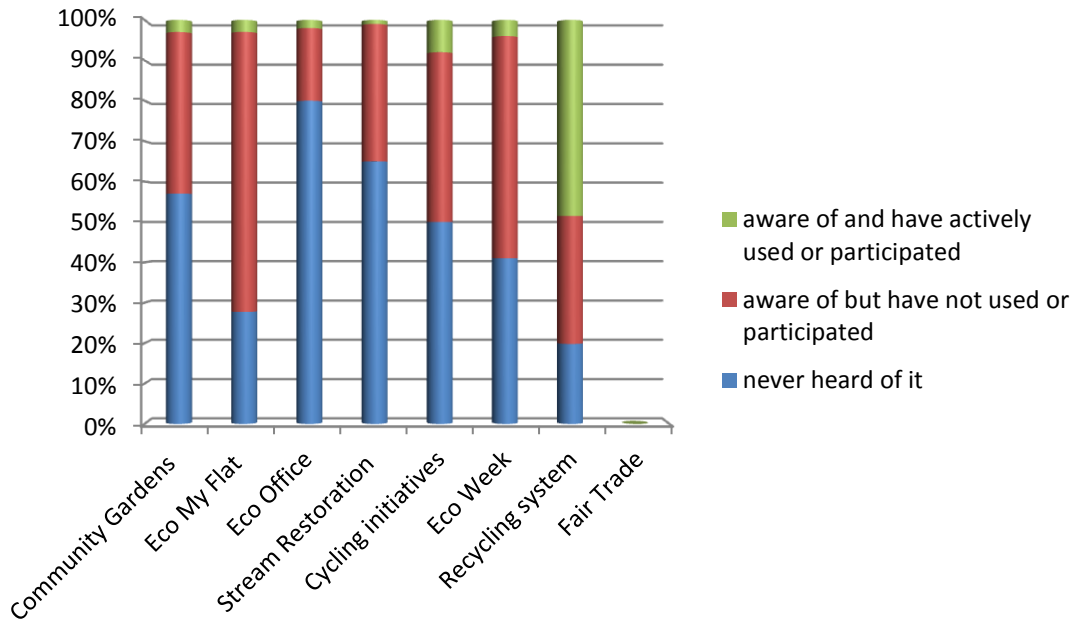


**Figure 8: Awareness of on-campus sustainability initiatives, 2011**

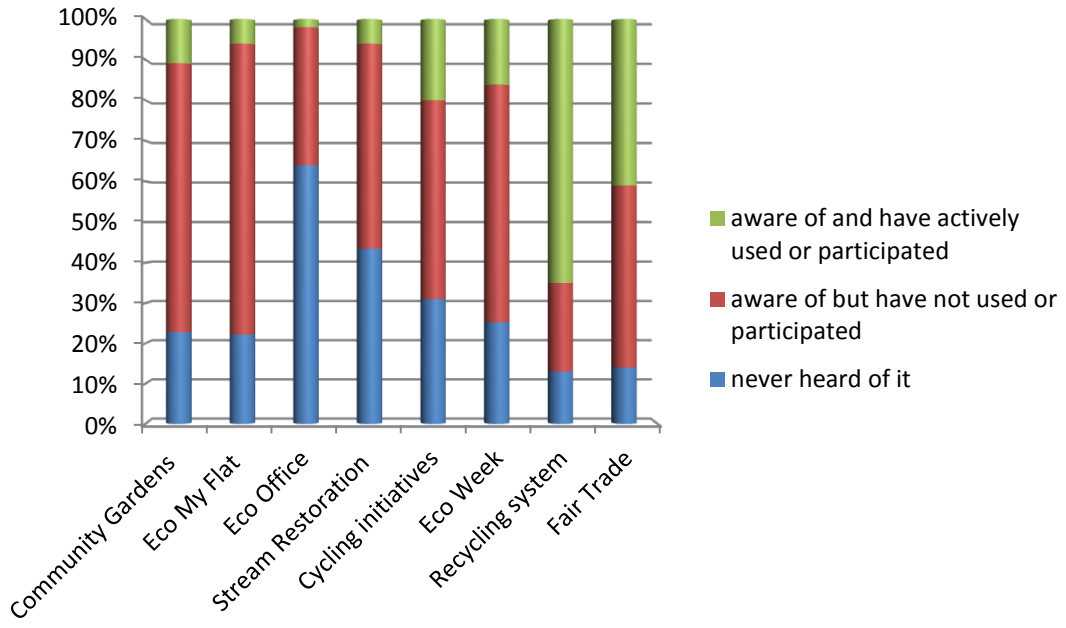


**Figure 9: Awareness of on-campus sustainability initiatives, 2013**

## UC Students have a resource-use, future-focussed understanding of sustainability

As in 2011, 2012 and 2013 we invited respondents to tell us what they thought sustainability means(Figures 10 and 11). A simple analysis of the most commonly used words in such definitions reveals a remarkable similarity. The words ‘resources’, ‘future’, ‘environment’ and ‘generations’ stand out prominently in all three years.

**Figure 10: Key words from sustainability definitions, 2013**

**Figure 11: Key words from sustainability definitions, 2011 (left) and 2012 (right)**

## Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from this exercise:

- Student interest in sustainability has increased
- More students believe that knowledge of sustainable practice will be important for employment in the near future
- Slightly more students felt UC's green credentials were important in their choice to study here
- More students are studying sustainability at UC
- More students would prefer to have more of a sustainability focus in their studies
- More students believe UC is doing well on its sustainability performance
- Students still feel that their college is performing well, although there was an increase in the proportion of those who felt their college was performing poorly
- Student awareness of on-campus sustainability initiatives has grown.
- A draft definition for sustainability based around notions of resource use, environment and future generations has general support from the student body.

## Recommendations

Given the foregoing, it is recommended that:

- References to sustainability and progress towards meeting sustainability targets outlined in the UC Sustainability Strategy (draft) be included in UC recruitment materials
- Operational initiatives (eg the community gardens, stream restoration, cycling infrastructure, recycling and fair trade) be maintained
- Efforts to develop a stronger curriculum for sustainability at UC be continued
- Colleges consider how to connect more with sustainability initiatives where possible
- Existing behaviour change programmes aimed at developing sustainability habits amongst the UC community (such as Eco My Flat and Eco Week) be maintained and integrated into formal studies where possible or, given high student interest, that the UCSA be approached as a partner organisation in delivering these initiatives
- Internal communications increase sustainability content so that students understand what the colleges and the university as a whole are doing about improving sustainability performance.