



**UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG**
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY OF HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY

2026-2031

MAY 2026

1. SUSTAINABILITY CODE

“Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Brundtland-Bericht, 1987)

Securing dignified living conditions for present and future generations is probably the greatest challenge that modern societies face. When it comes to effectively tackling the climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity and also global inequalities universities bear a special responsibility as engines of change through research, teaching and transfer. In its mission statement, Heidelberg University therefore names sustainability as its declared goal in all dimensions of action. Reaching this goal calls for a common understanding of sustainability and a strategy based on the following principles:

- Sustainability is a challenge that extends to all aspects of human action and can only be achieved through integrating its **environmental, economic and social dimensions**.
- Diversity and sustainability are closely connected. A diverse community promotes innovation, strengthens societal cohesion and enables the involving of different perspectives in decision-making processes. Hence, promoting diversity contributes directly to creating long-term resilient structures and comprehensively implementing the key ideas of sustainability.
- Sustainable development is an interactive process which can only proceed successfully when it is shaped and enriched by different perspectives, opinions and skills. The participation of all members of the university will ensure a **pluralist, interdisciplinary and transparent** process of setting priorities and taking decisions.
- The **United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and the **concept of planetary boundaries**¹ form a framework for our activities which calls for continuing development through research.
- Digital technologies offer great potential for driving sustainability – for example through a more efficient use of resources, better data analyses or more inclusive teaching and learning formats. However, sustainable development can only be shaped in a way fit for the future when digital innovations are used responsibly and with an eye to their ecological and societal impacts.

¹ Planetary Boundaries Science (PBScience), 2025: Planetary Health Check 2025. Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), Potsdam, Germany.

1. SUSTAINABILITY CODE

Following the ‘whole institution approach’, sustainability is embedded as a normative principle of global and intergenerational justice **in all performance dimensions** and with the participation of all status groups:

- **Research:** Alongside disciplinary approaches, sustainability research calls for inter- and transdisciplinary approaches for the generation of system, goal and transformation knowledge. As a comprehensive university, Heidelberg University aspires to establish a clearly recognizable research profile in the area of sustainability, building on its disciplinary strengths.
- **Teaching:** Following the principle of research-related teaching and learning, the imparting of knowledge and skills is intended to enable students to meet the challenges of sustainable development appropriately and to take responsible, future-focused action.
- **Transfer:** Having society share in knowledge and transferring research findings into applications is a fundamental prerequisite of sustainability. Transfer forms a key interface for our sustainability activities, together with the action fields of application, advice and communication.
- **Organization and operations:** As a university we also seek to live up to our function as a role model in the area of sustainability, both towards students and staff and towards the public. With the central goal of resource-saving operations, the university is engaged in a process of continual improvement which covers both technical as well as organizational and behavioral dimensions and requires appropriate governance.

2. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE



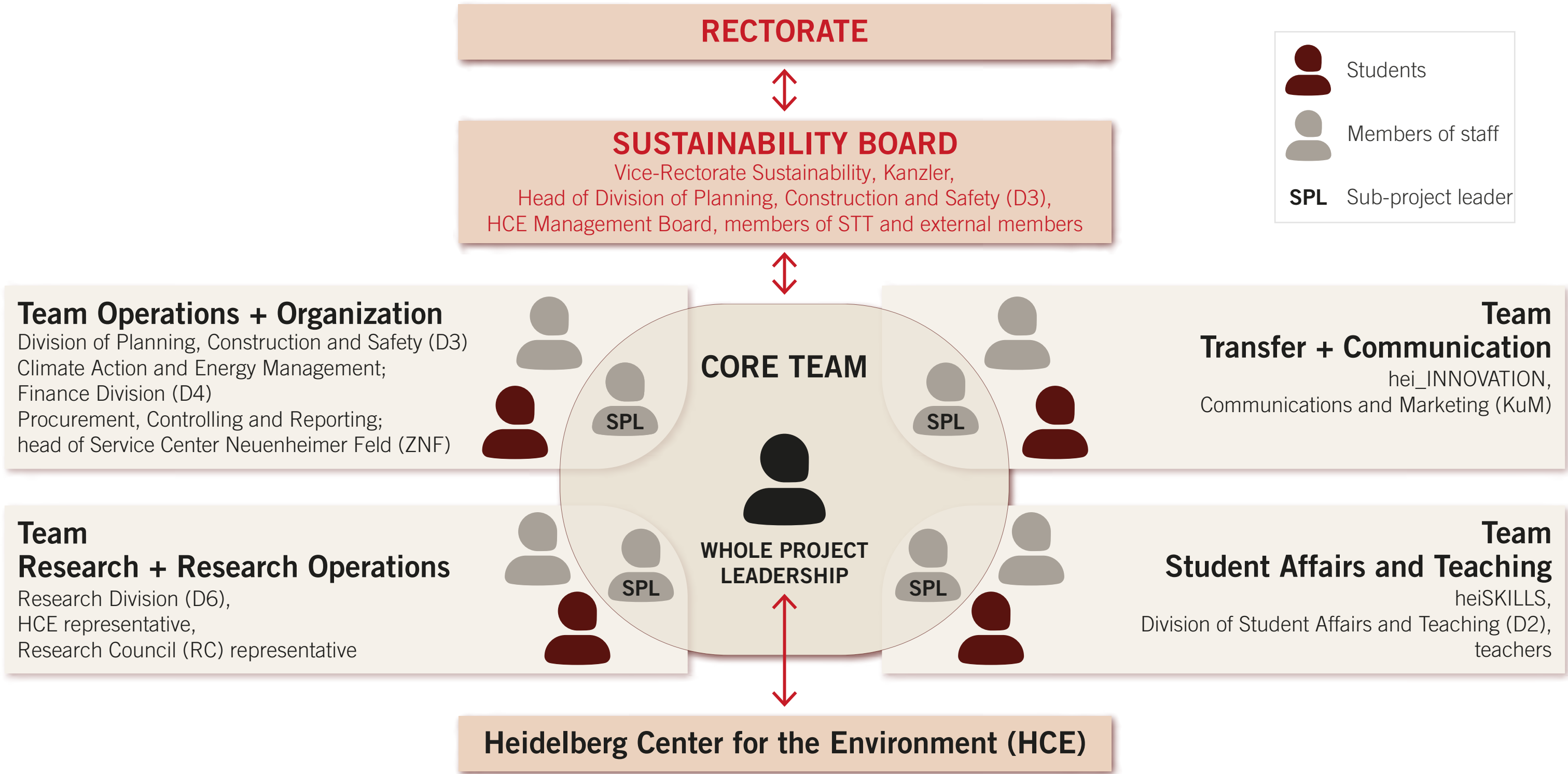
Despite many different activities in the areas of research, teaching and transfer, plus operations, Heidelberg University had not as yet had a holistic sustainability policy. That is why, in October 2023, the Rectorate commissioned the *Heidelberg Center for the Environment* (HCE) with coordinating a participatory process to draft recommendations for a sustainability strategy for the whole university. To this end, and involving all university status groups, November 2023 saw the establishment of the **Sustainability Think Tank (STT)**, which – using a whole institution approach – explored all relevant fields of action in five working groups on research, teaching, communication and transfer, operations and research operations. In order to create a well-founded basis for the sustainability strategy, they first recorded the status quo on existing sustainability activities; then followed a benchmarking exercise based on the sustainability activities and strategies of comparable universities in order to identify the strengths and weakness of Heidelberg University’s initiatives to date. The measures developed and discussed both in the working groups and the STT plenary were submitted to the Rectorate at the end of 2024 as **STT recommendations**. The Rectorate made a selection of STT recommendations in a structured decision-making process. In order to guarantee effective priority-setting, it began by conducting a double materiality assessment (DMA) in order to identify particularly relevant topics and options for action.

2. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

In parallel, the members of the working groups fed in their estimations of the relevance of the proposed measures, which made for a broad specialist and institutional perspective. Finally, the Rectorate assessed the proposed measures additionally from cost-benefit viewpoints, in order to identify measures which would have the greatest possible effect with, at the same time, an efficient use of resources. Proposed action exclusively concerning the social dimension were forwarded to UNIFY (Unit for Family, Diversity and Equality), the central institution at Heidelberg University dealing with balancing professional and family life and preventing discrimination. Many aspects of social sustainability were likewise covered in a participatory process leading to the adoption of a separate Diversity Policy 2024-2029. The following Sustainability Strategy contains no specific measures on digitalization, either; they will be phrased and set out in the context of the forthcoming Digitalization Strategy.

Setting up a clear governance structure is a central component of the transformation process. Hence, in parallel to the *Sustainability Think Tank*, intensive talks took place on the detailed structure of future project management. An important criterion for success was identified – that both the operational and the academic fields of action must be appropriately represented in order to reach the goals set in all action fields. Establishing the Sustainability Office at the HCE created the organizational backbone for a professional project management. The Sustainability Office supports the Rectorate with the strategic regulation and operational implementation of the Sustainability Strategy of Heidelberg University. It functions as a central coordination point for sustainability measures in the areas of research, operations and research operations, student affairs and teaching, as well as transfer and communication. The governance structure links the strategic regulation by the Rectorate and the Sustainability Board with the operational implementation through the Sustainability Office, sub-project leaders and thematic implementation teams. All members of the university may submit ideas for measures to the Sustainability Office. Sub-project leaders and the Sustainability Office manager then make specific proposals. After expert fine-tuning, these proposals are discussed in the Sustainability Board. The Board frames recommendations for prioritization while the Rectorate decides on the financing and implementation. The Sustainability Office subsequently coordinates the implementation through the sub-project leaders and makes regular progress reports (for details see Annex on Governance).

2. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE



3. SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY 2026-2031

With its Sustainability Strategy Heidelberg University pursues three overarching goals:

- Reducing its ecological footprint with respect to energy consumption, use of resources and CO₂ emissions (**footprint**)
- Maximizing the positive sustainability impact on student affairs, teaching and transfer (**handprint**)
- Promoting the contribution of research to sustainable development (**brainprint**)

To reach these goals it uses three main levers:

ENGAGE – involvement and raising awareness

Heidelberg University conscientizes its students, staff and external partners for sustainability issues and promotes active dialogue. Through events and participatory formats, all members and partners of the university are encouraged to join in.

EMPOWER – enabling and upskilling

Through further training, teaching formats and projects, Heidelberg University fosters sustainability-relevant skills and capacity-building. That empowers its members to act as multipliers and trigger sustainable changes in their sphere of activity.

ELEVATE – scaling and continuing development

The university invests in research, infrastructure and organizational measures in order to scale successful sustainability initiatives. The goal is to embed long-term changes and position the university as an engine for sustainable development.

3. SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY 2026-2031

This strategy paper provides an overview of the successes to date as well as goals and measures at the time of publication. Since the sustainable transformation of the university and the related strategy development are understood as an ongoing, long-term process, goals and measures are continually being evaluated and taken further. That also includes regular reflection on changing concepts of sustainability and its significance for the sustainable development of the university. In order to be able to respond to changed framework conditions and fresh findings, the strategy paper will be updated at regular intervals. Furthermore, future developments and progress achieved are to be documented in a detailed sustainability report.



3.1. RESEARCH

With its ambition to bring together a wide range of research disciplines in interdisciplinary discourse, for example in their interdisciplinary research incubators, Heidelberg as a comprehensive university has a unique potential for exploring the complex challenges of sustainable development processes at the level of excellence and thereby for substantially increasing its own **brainprint**. Competing at the national level it seeks to pool the university's strengths in order to highlight the unique features of identified flagship projects. In this context, the areas of (inter alia) internationalization, area studies and transfer can spark important initiatives. Besides specifically disciplinary methods, sustainability research requires inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to generate system, goal and transformation knowledge. As a comprehensive university, Heidelberg aspires to establish a clearly recognizable research profile in the area of sustainability, building on its disciplinary strengths.

The *Heidelberg Center for the Environment* (HCE) – the research consortium founded in the context of the Excellence Initiative in 2011 – brought together researchers from different faculties in interdisciplinary research projects and so acted successfully as a *matchmaking platform*, first within the Excellence Initiative, then later as an issue-focused interdisciplinary incubator arising from it. Since 2021 the theme of *climate action science* has emerged as a particular emphasis, with the collaboration of a broad range of natural and social science research disciplines. In parallel, however, it deals in an interdisciplinary way with other SDG-relevant topics, such as the loss of biodiversity, availability of water, etc. The core task of the HCE, recently re-established as a central research institution, is combining, initiating and supporting interdisciplinary initiatives on environmental research and ecosocial transformation. Starting from excellent basic research in the natural and social sciences and in cultural studies, this covers the clarification of fundamental mechanisms and processes including empirical studies and questions of scalability and ecosocial effectiveness. The university's Sustainability Office is located at the HCE, owing to the latter's expertise on ecosocial transformation processes. Alongside its own research, teaching and transfer agenda, the HCE will in the coming years also be a cooperation partner for the new *GreenRobust* Cluster of Excellence and the Flagship Initiative *Climate-Life-Nexus*. The *GreenRobust* cluster investigates how plants – particularly agricultural crops – adapt to the impacts of climate change, at different levels of scaling; this is taking place in close cooperation with the universities in Tübingen and Hohenheim. The Flagship Initiative *Climate-Life-Nexus*, which originated with considerable support from the HCE, focuses on questions relating to the impacts of climate change on human health, particularly in

3.1. RESEARCH

vulnerable societies; here the research-intensive *Heidelberg Institute of Global Health* (HIGH) is of particular significance. However, the climate-life nexus also examines the wide range of mitigation and adaptation approaches. The overall challenge is to maintain the dynamic of proven Heidelberg sustainability-related research fields and, in so doing, to harness the great potential of a research-intensive comprehensive university with its wide range of subjects in order to make constructive contributions to tackling the most challenging social issues.

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
	Strengthening interdisciplinary research on sustainability topics	Effective pooling and boosting of expertise at Heidelberg as a comprehensive university for internationally competitive exploration of key environmental and sustainability challenges	Pooling, initiating and supporting interdisciplinary initiatives on environmental research and ecosocial transformation as a core task of the newly constituted central research institution <i>Heidelberg Center for the Environment</i>	Short	– acquiring third-party-funded interdisciplinary group projects on environmental research and ecosocial transformation – developing evidence-based options for action for different social actors – making transfer contributions to local, national and international networking in the field of environmental research – coordinating the 4EU+ Flagship <i>Environmental Transitions</i> – representing the university in the area of environmental research in committees, consortia (e.g. German Climate Consortium) and at conferences (e.g. COPs)

2 Lever: magenta = engage; turquoise = empower; blue = elevate. The importance of the colored columns is explained in more detail in 3. SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY 2026-2031.

3 Deadline: short = short-term, 1-2 years; M/L = medium to long-term, 3-5 years.

3.1. RESEARCH

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
	Strengthening interdisciplinary research on sustainability topics	Strengthening and expanding Heidelberg research at the interface to climate justice – health	Promoting the Flagship Initiative <i>Climate-Life Nexus</i> to combine existing research projects and initiate dynamic new ones on climate change, health and justice with a focus on climate action and adaptation	Short	– acquiring interdisciplinary third-party-funded projects in the area of climate and health, and preparing an Excellence Cluster application – setting up internationally visible research cooperation agreements (e. g. WHO, IPCC, Lancet Countdown) – promoting early-career researchers through structured programs (e.g. research training groups, postdocs) at the climate-health interface
	Promoting sustainability as a firm component in research support and advice	Making a positive contribution from Heidelberg University to achieving the UN SDGs through heightening the researchers' awareness of the breadth of the SDGs and their connection with their own research	Urgently recommending that academics bear the sustainability topic in mind when discussing every grant application, address it in the application and support the quest for ideas	Short	– number of training and advice sessions on offer
	Empowering students	Actively involving students from Heidelberg University in inter- and transdisciplinary sustainability contexts	Students participating in transdisciplinary research projects	Short	– number of research projects in which students participated

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3.2. TEACHING

Following the principle of research-based teaching and learning, students are – through the imparting of knowledge and skills – to be enabled to meet the complex challenges of sustainable development appropriately and to take responsible, future-focused action. By training graduates to take sustainability-related knowledge, skills and values to the outside world, which will spark long-term transformation processes, Heidelberg University makes an essential contribution to its **hand- and brainprint**. Successes already achieved are the HCE College and Collegio Futuro curricula available at the *Heidelberg Center for the Environment* and in the 4EU+ European University Alliance. Further, the Faculty of Physics and Astronomy, together with the Heidelberg School of Education, offers the research-oriented hybrid module for future teachers “Climate physics meets education for sustainable development”. In addition, the Heidelberg School of Education has developed the supplementary and cross-sectoral qualification “Sustainability” for teachers and those training for the profession. What’s more, almost every faculty offers occasional classes on the topic of sustainability.

The *Sustainability Think Tank* (STT) was the first to raise and discuss the topic “Sustainability in teaching” across the university and status groups. The exchange beyond disciplinary boundaries – in close cooperation with the heiSKILLS Competence and Language Center – formed a stable starting point for promoting transformative skills in sustainability university-wide. It is our common educational goal to equip students with the necessary skills to sustainably shape the future and here link up directly with Heidelberg University’s graduate profile, contributing in particular to implementing Quality Goal 5, which underlines the readiness to take social responsibility. The participatory STT format opened doors for this across the faculties. It brought together disciplinary perspectives and triggered a subject-related discourse on how sustainability can be conceived, taught and examined – ranging from teachers and students acquiring individual skills to curricula to transfer into society.

Central to implementation are the program line *Lehre:N4Future* and the large-scale project *heiSPARK: Shaping Learning for Transformation* for which the Vice-Rectorate for Student Affairs and Teaching has acquired funding.

By involving heiSKILLS “Teaching and Learning” as a central support structure of the university and an actor with state-wide connections, it has been possible to mount *Lehre:N4Future* directly from the sustainability policy. A pilot project began in 2026 in the context of the Baden-Württemberg Higher Education Didactics Center, leading up to

3.2. TEACHING

the Baden-Württemberg Certificate for Higher Education Didactics focus “Transformative Skills for Sustainability”. Heidelberg is starting with, inter alia, the following options: “Project activity in university teaching: promoting transformative skills”, “Effective use of open educational resources in university teaching”, “Diversity in teaching: keeping diversity in mind – Sustainability as a cross-cutting topic?”, „Practice-oriented approaches in the World Café“, “*Innovation for Future – From Sustainability Challenges to Sustainable Innovations*” and “Transfer-oriented teaching (including collaboration, interdisciplinarity, project work)”. In parallel, Heidelberg University is coordinating with the Baden Württemberg-wide network about establishing *Lehre:N4Future* as a profile line in the whole state program; the first group is expected to qualify in 2027.

Furthermore, *heiSPARK: Shaping Learning for Transformation*, with a volume of €4.5 million in funding, provides a stable framework for transfer. In the coming four (plus two) years, subjects can implement projects fostering transformative skills in a decentralized manner; heiSKILLS Fellows are working on this in inter- and transdisciplinary teaching tandems with backup from the heiSKILLS team in terms of university didactics. In the program line *Together4Transformation* academics, students and partners from urban society develop hands-on implementation projects with a sustainability connection in *Integrated-Think-Tank* formats.

Overall, the sustainability strategy developed in the STT has stimulated syllabus profiling in the Baden-Württemberg Certificate for Higher Education Didactics, the cooperative evolution of curricula, and transfer into real-life transformation projects. As of 2026 the Vice-Rectorates for Sustainability and for Student Affairs and Teaching will initiate dialogue with the faculties on how to embed the fostering of transformative skills for sustainability in curricula. Targeted advisory resources are available for this via heiSKILLS Teaching and Learning. Linking structural embedding, participatory exchange and evidence-based transfer is proving a viable path – at Heidelberg University and, in the near future, beyond.

The measures in Teaching as an action area are subdivided into a micro, meso and macro level⁴.

⁴ The micro level emphasizes students and teachers acquiring skills. The focus lies on the individual. The meso level concentrates on the transformation of teaching and learning formats, and also curricula. The focus lies on the structures. The macro level centers on action in the societal context and the transfer of knowledge.

3.2. TEACHING

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
	Fostering the acquisition of transformative skills among students and teachers (micro level)	Developing individual abilities to foster sustainable thinking and action on the part of students	Developing the certificate Skills4Future	Short	– Number of participants in certificate program – Meeting ECTS requirements
			Introducing certification/ recognition for student initiatives	Short	– Number of student initiatives recognized
			Advertising the sustainability courses on offer in 4EU+	Short	– Number of advertised 4EU+ offerings carried out jointly with Heidelberg University
			Integrating HSE's supplementary/cross-cutting qualification in sustainability into the educational policy of Heidelberg University	Short	– Number of students receiving the certificate
			Establishing the profile line “Transformation Literacy” in the Heidelberg Didactics Certificate for Tutors	Short	– Number of tutors trained – Number of tutorials on offer, as appropriate
			Introducing the topic of sustainability in the Orientation Week for new students	Short	– Number of offerings on sustainability in Orientation Week
		Developing individual abilities to foster sustainable thinking and action on the part of teachers	Establishing a profile line <i>Lehre:N4Future</i> in the context of the Baden-Württemberg Certificate for Higher Education Didactics	M/L	– Number of participants in profile line <i>Lehre:N4Future</i> – Number of teaching projects publicized in HINT (Heidelberg Inspirations for Innovative Teaching) and presentations in Meet2Talk (good practice series)
			Setting up a community of reflective practitioners to disseminate good practice	Short	– Number of contributions in the area of transformative skills

² Lever: magenta = engage; turquoise = empower; blue = elevate. The importance of the colored columns is explained in more detail in **3. SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY 2026-2031**.

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3.2. TEACHING

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
	Transformation of teaching and learning formats, and also curricula at Heidelberg University (meso level)	Establishing sustainability and fostering transformative skills as a cross-cutting issue in all courses	Dialogue process on mapping of courses and considering SDGs in module handbooks	Short	– Number of workshops offered by heiSKILLS – Establishing criteria for sustainable courses – Mapping of courses
			Introducing the <i>Team-up!</i> format to support subject experts by experts for transformative teaching development	M/L	– Number of training sessions, workshops carried out – Number of courses relating to / on transformative skills
	Promoting an active shaping of societal processes (macro level)	Acting in the social sphere by transfer of knowledge and skills into society	Introducing the “Teaching that Matters” format, an annual <i>Integrated-Think-Tank</i> to promote transfer-oriented courses	Short	– Number of workshops held – Number of findings by workshops

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3.3. TRANSFER AND COMMUNICATION

A fundamental precondition for sustainability is sharing knowledge with society and turning research results into applications. With the action fields of application, advice and communication, transfer forms a central interface for our sustainability activities and makes a valuable contribution to the **handprint** of Heidelberg University. Heidelberg University has enshrined the topic of sustainability in its Transfer Code. The transfer-related sustainability projects initiated to date include those listed below. Impact Day, held annually, featured an SDG workshop to introduce students and researchers at the university to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The participants could check on how their research was linked to one or several SDGs – or conversely, whether they can contribute to implementing them with their work in future. The Climate Change Garden in Bergheim was also initiated. A climate change garden is emerging on the little used roof area of the underground carpark of the Psychiatric Hospital, which heats up enormously in summer. Climate-adapted plants, display elements and urban gardening are creating a location offering an experience of climate adaptation, inviting people to a time of recreation and serving as a research and presentation area. Workshops, exhibitions and interactive programs for citizens are giving rise to a new space for encounter, which links ecological, social and cultural aspects and gives ideas for a future-ready greening of cities. Furthermore, Heidelberg University has since autumn 2024 been a member of the Green Industry Cluster, which unites companies and research institutions in the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region. The network's goal is to drive forward innovations with a sustainability connection. In the area of communication, a milestone in 2021 was the designing of a sustainability web page on the university's central website. Since then, the web page has posted reports on the university's strategic orientation in the area of sustainability, and on current sustainability-related developments in the respective action fields.

3.3. TRANSFER AND COMMUNICATION

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
	Expanding communication and promoting awareness	Expanding and embedding a culture of sustainability at Heidelberg University through heightening awareness among staff and students and strengthening the university as a multiplier for sustainability in academia and society	Targeting communication of sustainability activities	M/L	– Reporting regularly on sustainability-related topics using various channels
			Integrating the sustainability issue in the Long Night of the Sciences	M/L	– Successfully integrating the sustainability issue into the Long Night of the Sciences
			Holding a Sustainability Festival	Short	– Number of participants – Number of successful start-ups and initiatives connected with the festival
			Introducing a Climate Day for staff members	Short	– Number of Climate Days conducted
	Strengthening transfer and innovation for sustainability	Sustainable, bidirectional knowledge transfer at Heidelberg University to promote green innovation, societal impact and practical research	Developing a sustainability tool for knowledge transfer activities	Short	– Number of new projects using the tool per year – Number of projects which, after using the tool, have implemented sustainable improvements such as less resource use and reduced CO ₂ emissions
			Promoting sustainability-related bidirectional transfer	Short	– Number and kind of Citizen Science Projects and engagement of local population – Number and impact of active partnerships with industry, politics, education and NGOs, including participation in governing bodies

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3.3. TRANSFER AND COMMUNICATION

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	Strengthening transfer and innovation for sustainability	Sustainable, bidirectional knowledge transfer at Heidelberg University to promote green innovation, societal impact and practical research	Holding a start-up competition for the sustainable/social/ climate-friendly operation of scientific facilities at Heidelberg University	Short	– Number of submitted, supported and successfully implemented business ideas and projects – Assessment of quality, benefit, and ecological and social improvements in university operations through feedback and impact assessments
			Promoting sustainability-related bidirectional transfer	Short	– Number and kind of Citizen Science Projects plus engagement of local population – Number and impact of active partnerships with industry, politics, education and NGOs, including participation in governing bodies
	Promoting transdisciplinary education & networking	Promoting sustainable innovation, start-up ideas and practical projects by Heidelberg University through socially oriented research transfer	Offering regular Marsilius bridge seminars on the topic of innovation management and sustainability	Short	– Number of Marsilius bridge seminars conducted
			Promoting living labs with a sustainability connection	Short	– Number of living labs initiated or conducted
			Holding regular SDG workshops on Impact Day	Short	– Number of workshop participants and documented discussions and methods employed – Number of projects focusing on at least one SDG after the workshop
	Creating programs to raise awareness among staff members	Raising awareness of staff for sustainability challenges and their own options for action	Promoting business trips to the KLIMA ARENA (e.g. based on a framework program)	Short	– Number of awareness-raising measures for staff members

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3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

With the central goal of resource-saving operations the university wishes to reduce its own carbon footprint. To this end, it is engaged in a process of continual improvement encompassing both technical and organizational and behavioral dimensions and requiring appropriate governance. Optimizations between climate action and operational energy management have been ongoing, not least with the hiring of a climate action manager in 2021. 2023 saw the framing of the integrated climate action policy and work has continued ever since to implement its measures.

The university understands itself to be an active driver of Baden-Württemberg's climate action goals and subscribes unequivocally to their implementation. At the same time, it is aware that it cannot realize all measures by itself. Some steps call for the participation of external partners and hence do not solely lie in the university's area of responsibility. Nevertheless, the university will apply its creative energy to influencing these processes and ensuring that transformation goes ahead in keeping with the shared climate goals. Not included in the strategy are proposed measures lying completely outside the university's area of responsibility, such as the meals supplied by the student services organization (Studierendenwerk), which is legally autonomous. Information on the sustainability and climate action guidelines of the Heidelberg Studierendenwerk is available [here](#).

3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
Buildings and grounds					
	Intensifying sustainable planning and building	Resource-saving, energy-efficient planning and construction of buildings at Heidelberg University to minimize environmental pollution	Hiring an architect or construction engineer	Short	– Hiring a person (architect or construction engineer for planning/work on civil engineering/outside space, standards etc.)
			Producing sustainability profiles of university buildings	M/L	– Consumption and emissions indicators: energy consumption in MWh, water consumption in m ³ , carbon footprint in t CO ₂ e per building – Feedback from institutions on user-friendliness of measures and/or infrastructure
			Preparing a calculation tool for institutions and research groups to work out energy consumption and CO₂e emissions	Short	– Using data on facility-related energy and CO ₂ e emissions to assess sustainability when applying for research equipment and initial furnishings – Publishing data depicting the frequency of web page hits over a certain period – Taking compensation measures
	Promoting facility management and surface use	Optimum use and administration of surfaces at Heidelberg University to avoid them remaining vacant and wasting resources	Introducing/further developing efficient area management	Short	– Surfaces saved in m ² – Surfaces serving as co-working space in m ²
			Optimizing use of functional spaces	Short	– Reduction in energy consumption in MWh plus saving of greenhouse gas emissions in t CO ₂ e – Number of laboratory premises with adapted air exchange rates

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3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
Buildings and grounds					
	Promoting facility management and surface use	Optimum use and administration of surfaces at Heidelberg University to avoid them remaining vacant and wasting resources	Continuing the incentive system for institutions on reducing carbon emissions	Short M/L	– Number of participating institutions – Reduction in carbon emissions compared to prior year in t CO₂e and overall amount of electricity costs saved in euros – Share of energy-efficient devices cofinanced by the university
	Further developing energy efficiency and resource management	Reducing energy and water consumption at Heidelberg University through efficient technologies	Installation of LED lighting inside buildings and in outside areas	Short	– Number of lamps replaced – Greenhouse gas emissions saved in t CO₂e
			Local use of waste heat	Short	– Energy saved through use of waste heat in MWh – Number of ventilation heat pumps installed
			Retrofitting taps with mixing nozzles	M/L	– Reduction of water consumption in m²
	Expanding ecological grounds, intensifying biodiversity and urban health, plus adapting to climate change	Landscaping grounds at Heidelberg University to promote biodiversity, adapt to climate change and improve the well-being of users	Biodiversity model for use of outside surfaces	M/L	– Number of biodiversity-promoting construction measures – Vacant spaces arising in m² – Degree of greening of surfaces and biodiversity quality of such greening – Number of greened facades – Number of redesigned transit spaces

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3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
Buildings and grounds					
	Expanding ecological grounds, intensifying biodiversity and urban health, plus adapting to climate change	Landscaping grounds at Heidelberg University to promote biodiversity, adapt to climate change and improve the well-being of users	Implementing a Climate Change Garden	Short	– Reduction in carbon emissions through use of climate-resilient plants and resource-saving sprinkler systems – Number and diversity of participants in educational events (e.g. workshops, guided tours)
			Carrying out urban gardening projects	M/L	– Number of urban gardening projects
Energy					
	Expanding renewable energies and improving energy generation	Promoting the use of renewable energies at Heidelberg University through reducing emissions	Expanding photovoltaic plants on rooves, facades, parking spaces and suitable areas (expanding PV with multiple use, as appropriate)	Short	– Annual number of installed and operating modules on rooves, facades, parking spaces and suitable areas in m² – Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from electricity consumption in t CO ₂ e – Holding a living lab
			Converting the cogeneration unit in Neuenheimer Feld to renewable energy	Short	– Reduction in energy-related greenhouse gas emissions in t CO ₂ e – Rise in air quality in immediate vicinity of existing cogeneration unit, as relevant
			Switching to 100 % certified ecopower label	M/L	– Share of certified ecopower in total electricity consumption in MWh

² Lever: **magenta** = engage; **turquoise** = empower; **blue** = elevate. The importance of the colored columns is explained in more detail in **3. SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY 2026-2031**.

³ Deadline: short = short-term, 1-2 years; M/L = medium to long-term, 3-5 years.

3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
Energy					
	Promoting energy upgrading and building technology	Improving energy efficiency at Heidelberg University and technical optimization	Producing an energy upgrade plan for stock of state buildings by Energy and Technical Building Management	M/L	– Annual number of renovated buildings – Energy savings in MWh – Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in t CO ₂ e
			Optimizing use of air-conditioning systems	M/L	– Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from electricity consumption in t CO ₂ e
			Technical temperature regulation at workplaces	M/L	– Measuring heat savings in real time – Number of digital thermostats installed annually
	Strengthening energy management and monitoring	Continual recording and regulation of energy consumption at Heidelberg University to increase efficiency	Active energy management including widespread expansion of energy meters	Short	– Number of energy meters replaced
			Technical monitoring in the context of new buildings and renovation projects	Short	– Energy savings in MWh – Cost savings in euros – Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in t CO ₂ e
	Aspiring to obtain sustainability certifications	Promoting sustainable practices at Heidelberg University through certification and user motivation	Certification of Computing Centre operations (Blue Angel for computing centers)	M/L	– Proof of energy saving actually achieved in MWh

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3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
Mobility					
	Establishing strategic mobility planning	Developing an integrated plan at Heidelberg University to optimize mobility and traffic flows	Producing a mobility plan	M/L	– Completed evaluation of needs analysis and mobility plan
			Revising the parking space management plan	Short	– Number of parking spaces per vehicle type compared to period before production of mobility plan (car, bicycle, e-mobility) – Revising of existing agreements with external partners
	Promoting cycling	Increasing the share of cycling at Heidelberg University through expanding safe and attractive cycling infrastructure and improving the general conditions for cycling	Expanding the cycle paths and creating additional cycle parking spaces (including PV roofing)	M/L	– Number of dedicated cycle paths – Number of bicycle shelters with and without PV, number of multistorey bicycle parks – Number of cycle parking places for long cycles (cargo bikes, buggies for children) – Number of bicycle garages
			Expanding the service offering such as more bike repair centers and expanding charging stations for e-bikes per campus	M/L	– Number of maintenance points – Number of (pilot) charging stations installed – Numbers of charging station users
			Expanding the bike-sharing offering for students and staff	M/L	– Number of VRN bike offerings on campus for staff and next-bike offerings for students – Number of cargo bikes available – Result available after evaluation of chosen means of transportation

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3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
Mobility					
	Reducing individual car travel	Reducing car travel at Heidelberg University through promoting more sustainable forms of mobility	Increasing e-charging stations for cars	M/L	– Number of charging stations supplied by third parties
			Introducing car-sharing options for university members (framework agreement with local service-providers)	Short	– Number of people registered as using car-sharing
	Reducing plane travel	Reducing emissions from intercontinental flights through an internal incentive system	Introducing a university-internal CO₂ levy on intercontinental flights oriented to the CO₂ price for emission certificates in the European emissions trading system plus annual redistribution of income to all professorial chairs, junior professors and departments		– Number of intercontinental flights per year – Share of intercontinental flights in all university plane travel – Estimated carbon emissions avoided through reduced plane travel – Sum of redistributions to professorial chairs/departments
	Raising awareness for sustainable mobility	Promoting motivation and commitment to sustainable development at Heidelberg University	Holding Mobility Days with competitions and events to raise awareness of the potential and advantages of sustainable mobility	M/L	– Number of Mobility Days held

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³ Deadline: short = short-term, 1-2 years; M/L = medium to long-term, 3-5 years.

3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
Purchasing					
	Promoting more sustainable procurement	Promoting ecological, economic and socially responsible procurement at Heidelberg University	Integrating sustainability criteria into procurement processes while considering applicable legal requirements, transparency about current developments in procurement with a focus on ecological, social and economic aspects of sustainability and developing recommendations for action to achieve sustainable procurement	Short	– Availability of a recommendation for action – Communication of existing sustainability criteria and drawing up further such criteria for the field of procurement
Waste disposal and circular economy					
	Optimizing waste avoidance, separation and disposal	Developing an effective, resource-saving and environmentally sound management at Heidelberg University through the systematic recording and assessment of existing waste flows	Producing a waste handling plan including recording the status quo, identifying potential savings and introducing appropriate measures such as conducting a waste reduction campaign	M/L	– Cutting back thermal waste recycling in t CO₂ plus raising the recycling quota – Campaigns conducted
		Using resources sustainably and reducing environmental pollution at Heidelberg University	Setting up more used battery collection points	Short	– Number of used battery collection points

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³ Deadline: short = short-term, 1-2 years; M/L = medium to long-term, 3-5 years.

3.4. ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
Waste disposal and circular economy					
	Creating transparency in waste management	Sharing information and communicating about challenges at Heidelberg University	Transparent communication of general conditions and challenges in waste management (status quo and obstacles to implementation)	M/L	– Setting up a website for transparent communication about obstacles
Events					
	Creating a culture of discussion with the aim of minimizing environmental impacts	Conducting university-internal discussion on the topic of sustainable events	Offering discussion formats on introducing sustainable catering (e.g. checklist on sustainable handling of resources, plant-based catering etc.)	Short	– Number of discussion formats held
Controlling					
	Transparency and ensuring that goals are reached	Continual establishing of effective, measurable checks on implementation to evaluate the measures described and implemented in the Sustainability Strategy	Checking on implementation of measures	Short	– Introduction of effective implementation control – Discussions held between Division 4, Controlling and Reporting Department, and the Sustainability Office

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3.5. RESEARCH OPERATIONS

Operating research laboratories is one of the most resource-intensive work environments at a university and this consequently constitutes a substantial share of the university **footprint** – the life and natural sciences located at the Im Neuenheimer Feld campus account for approximately 80 % of the whole of the university's electricity consumption. Research is the central focus of university activities, which is why the development and implementation of sustainability policies represent a complex field of conflict between subject-related, organizational and social interests. It must be clearly stated, however, that scientific excellence and sustainability aspirations are not mutually exclusive. Sustainability measures are not intended to hamper or disproportionately restrict research – their entry point is where they support research, reduce risks or enable ecological improvements with acceptable effort.

An essential factor for success is close cooperation between researchers and facility management: in all areas falling under its sphere of influence – in particular, energy supply, building equipment, laboratory infrastructure, surface use and waste management – effective solutions can only be developed and conflicts of purpose avoided together. For example, Heidelberg University is already intentionally optimizing equipment known for its large-scale consumption. In the framework of an equipment renewal program, the Rectorate has provided funds for modern, energy-efficient ultra-deep-freeze appliances enabling a reduction of energy consumption of up to 76 %. This program had already replaced 17 obsolete appliances by September 2025. In addition, the university's energy manager is checking out life-cycle optimization of energy-intensive ventilation plants.

Developing sustainability policies calls for a well-founded database. While facility management is generally aware of large-scale consumption systems there is often no reliable data on hand for everyday research processes. To improve this situation, a project has been underway since 2023 to calculate the carbon footprint in research operations; it aims to enable researchers to develop their own initiatives for action so that, taking account of their goal priorities, more efficient research operations will be possible. At the same time, this project fosters the participation of students and researchers in transformative processes. In addition, with the aim of making their own research processes more sustainable, researchers in 2025 successfully acquired three projects in the framework of the competition *“BWGreenLabs – Sustainable Use of Energy and Resources in Research Laboratories of the State of Baden-Württemberg”* mounted by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts. A similar approach is Heidelberg University's participation in the international certification program *“My Green Lab”*, in which 23 laboratories have taken part to date and 13 have gained the highest award.

3.5. RESEARCH OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
	Heightening awareness and knowledge communication on the topic of sustainability and research	Heightening awareness of sustainability from the start and promoting sustainable laboratory practices at Heidelberg University through information and participation	Introducing a sustainability onboarding program	Short	– Share of new doctoral students and staff attending the welcoming events and onboarding workshops – Results of participant surveys on satisfaction with the onboarding program and the knowledge imparted about sustainability offerings
			Producing a sustainability guide for research and laboratory operations	Short	– Number of guides downloaded or requested – Number of research groups having developed their own adapted guides – Amount of feedback and satisfaction expressed by users through surveys or feedback forms
	Intensifying the circular economy & resource efficiency in research laboratories	Promoting more resource-saving research operations at Heidelberg University through sustainable use, re-use and recycling of materials and equipment	Conducting Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs) and then introducing appropriate measures	M/L	– Number of LCAs held or materials examined – Amount of more sustainable material used at an LCA – Measurement of the energy and water consumption saved and of saved carbon emissions and quantity of waste per laboratory/working group/institute after introducing the relevant measure
			Certifying all laboratory operations through <i>MyGreenLab</i>	Short	– Number of laboratories certified by <i>MyGreenLab</i>
			Reducing administrative obstacles to the reuse and continuing use of scientific equipment	M/L	– Annual report of the scientific devices handed over internally and externally based on the item “grounds for withdrawal” already posted on the form “Inventar-Abgangsverfügung” (inventory withdrawal order)

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3.5. RESEARCH OPERATIONS

L ²	Goal	Goal description	Measures (selection)	Term ³	Indicators (selection)
	Intensifying the circular economy & resource efficiency in research laboratories	Promoting more resource-saving research operations at Heidelberg University through sustainable use, re-use and recycling of materials and equipment	Holding device and materials swap fairs	M / L	– Consolidated figures on articles advertised and transferred at the swap fair and on general traffic on the system – Number of registrations and active users of swap fairs and online platforms on the shared use of analytic equipment
			Establishing a research database	Short	– Share of retrievable data on the research database established comprises 50 % of all research projects at Heidelberg University since 2015 – 25 % of subjects/disciplines participated in the research database

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4. SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

The Sustainability Strategy of Heidelberg University offers clear orientation for sustainable development and aims to strengthen the university's position as a front-runner and role model in the area of sustainability in academia and society. The strategy is based on a well-founded analysis of the general conditions due to recommendations from a participatory process, and it defines key fields of action to integrate sustainability principles in all areas of university activities in future. Through innovative approaches, interdisciplinary research, holistic teaching, effective communication and lived sustainability in university operations Heidelberg University can make a substantive contribution to achieving the global sustainable development goals (SDGs). With its broad expertise, strong networks and the engagement of its members the university has a chance of playing a key role in dealing with sustainability challenges. Particular thanks go to all STT members and to all stakeholders involved, who with their commitment and expertise have contributed greatly to drawing up this Sustainability Strategy. Together as Heidelberg University we can now pave the way to a sustainable future.



5. ANNEX GOVERNANCE

SUSTAINABILITY BOARD

The Sustainability Board plays a strategic advisory role and sets priorities for sustainability activities at Heidelberg University.

COMPOSITION

The Sustainability Board consists of:

- the member of the Rectorate responsible for sustainability (chairperson)
- the Kanzler
- the Management Board of the Heidelberg Center for the Environment (HCE)
- the Head of the Division of Planning, Construction and Safety (D3) or their deputy
- selected internal and external experts

The composition ensures that all relevant perspectives feed into the process of navigating the Sustainability Strategy.

TASKS

The Sustainability Board has, in particular, the following tasks:

- Advising on further development of the university's Sustainability Strategy
- Discussing and assessing proposed measures and projects
- Prioritizing measures in the context of available resources
- Advising the manager of the Sustainability Office on project management
- Discussing possible conflicts of goals between different measures

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- Assessing progress with implementing the Sustainability Strategy
- Drafting recommendations to the Rectorate on the prioritizing and funding of measures

The Board makes recommendations on prioritizing measures and the use of funds.
The final decision on funding individual measures is taken by the Rectorate.

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

The Sustainability Board will generally meet with the internal Board members once a quarter and with the external Board members once a year. Additional meetings may be called if necessary.

CONVENING AND MODERATION

- The chairperson shall convene the meetings.
- The chairperson, in the role of moderator, shall chair the meetings.

PREPARATIONS FOR MEETINGS

The Sustainability Office is responsible for organizing and making substantive preparations for meetings.
That includes, in particular:

- Drawing up the agenda in consultation with the chairperson
- Preparing relevant background information on decisions
- Producing progress reports on the implementation of the Sustainability Strategy
- Preparing documents for decision on questions of priority-setting and budgetary relevance
- Documenting and minuting the meetings
- Following up the measures adopted

5. ANNEX GOVERNANCE

THE DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

The development, prioritization and implementation of sustainability measures shall take place according to a clearly defined governance process.

1. **Submitting proposals for measures**

Proposals for new measures in the context of the Sustainability Strategy are submitted through sub-project leaders and/or action area teams, as well as through the manager of the Sustainability Office.

2. **Expert editing**

The Sustainability Office checks and structures the proposals, assesses their strategic relevance in the context of the Sustainability Strategy and prepares them for consideration by the Sustainability Board.

3. **Consideration by the Sustainability Board**

The proposed measures are discussed in the Sustainability Board meeting. The Board assesses their strategic compatibility, possible conflicts of goals and resource requirements.

4. **Prioritization recommendation**

Based on the discussion, the Sustainability Board expresses an opinion on the priority accorded the measures and the possible use of funds.

5. **Decision in the Rectorate**

The Rectorate takes the final decision on the supporting and financing of measures.

6. **Implementation and monitoring**

The Sustainability Office coordinates the implementation of the measures decided together with the responsible action area teams and makes regular progress reports to the Sustainability Board and the Rectorate.

5. ANNEX GOVERNANCE

MANAGEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABILITY OFFICE

The manager of the Sustainability Office shall coordinate the implementation of the Sustainability Strategy and report directly to the executive manager of the Heidelberg Center for the Environment (HCE).

The core tasks include project coordination, monitoring of measures, preparing background information for decision-taking by the Board and the Rectorate, as well as networking both inside and outside the university.

SUB-PROJECT LEADERS

Sub-project leaders are responsible for the substantive and operational implementing of measures in their respective action areas:

- Identifying challenges and developing proposed solutions
- Submitting proposals for measures in the framework of the Sustainability Strategy
- Operationally managing and coordinating the project team
- Reporting on progress, risks and resource need
- Regularly coordinating with the manager of the Sustainability Office

The sub-project leaders report regularly to the Sustainability Office manager. The latter then combines the information, writes progress reports and reports to the Sustainability Board.

5. ANNEX GOVERNANCE

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The following governance elements are provided for the continuing development of the Sustainability Strategy:

ANNUAL STRATEGY RETREAT

The Sustainability Board conducts an annual strategy retreat. The aim is to

- review the progress of the Sustainability Strategy
- identify new strategic areas of action
- discuss long-term objectives
- coordinate central priorities for the coming year

The results of the retreat shall serve as the basis for further strategic guidance by the Rectorate.

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

The Sustainability Office shall produce an annual progress report on the implementation of the Sustainability Strategy which is submitted to the Sustainability Board and the Rectorate.

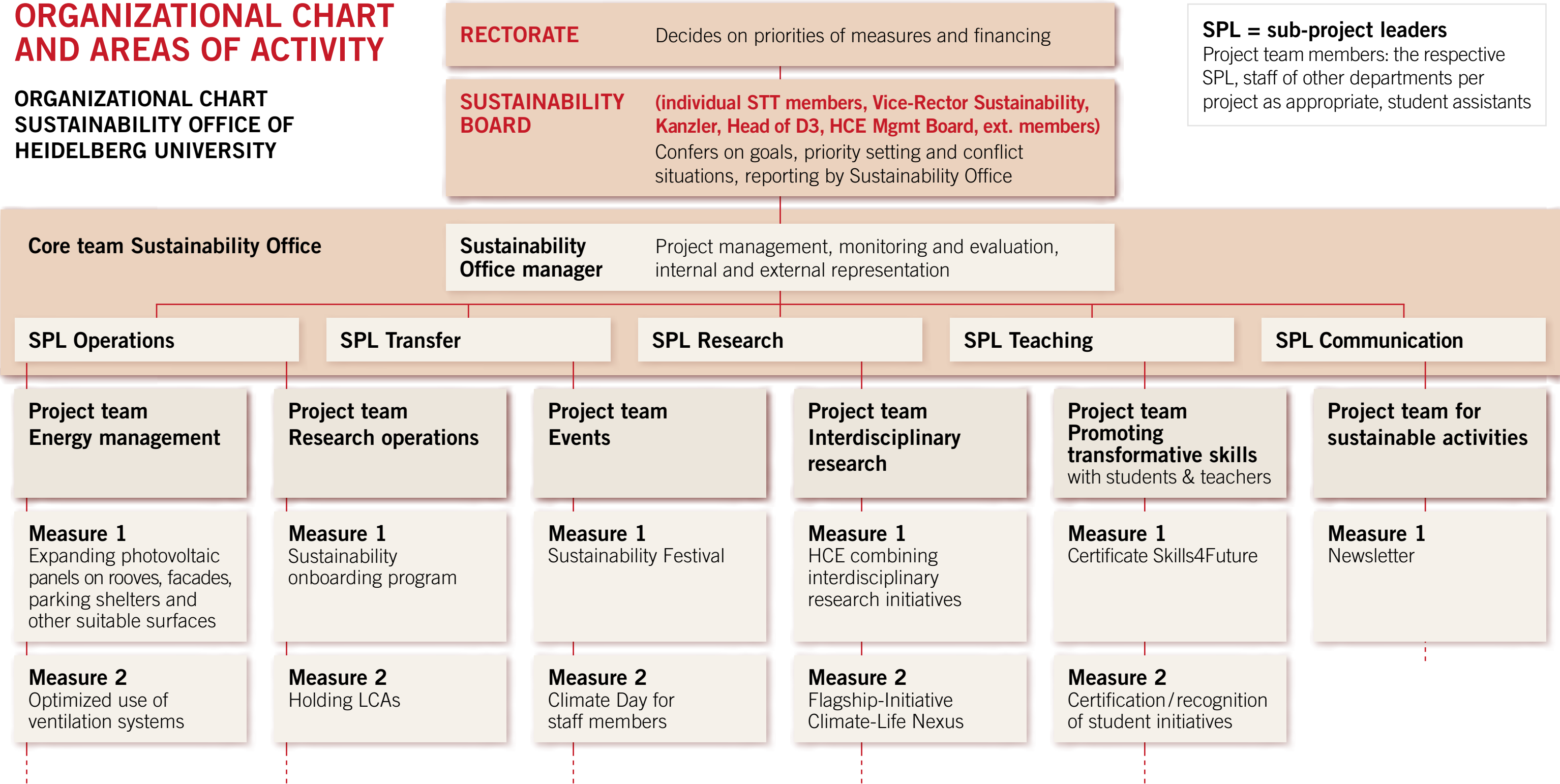
The report includes, in particular:

- the implementation status of key measures
- progress achieved in the action areas
- challenges and conflicts of purpose identified
- recommendations for future priorities and measures

5. ANNEX GOVERNANCE

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART AND AREAS OF ACTIVITY

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART SUSTAINABILITY OFFICE OF HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY



5. ANNEX GOVERNANCE

AREAS OF ACTIVITY

Sustainability Office manager	Internal	External
Project management/ coordination of Sustainability Strategy	Generally coordinates implementation of Sustainability Strategy, prioritizing projects/measures based on feedback from the Board and Rectorate – in consultation with team leads, supporting them in overcoming obstacles	Coordinates and builds up network with university-internal and external stakeholders; coordinates with Sustainability Board and adapts internal project management, as required
Monitoring and evaluation	Monitors and evaluates progress in respective thematic fields/streams, supplies data for reporting, as required	Discusses progress and challenges with Board, as required, and adapts it internally, coordinating data for sustainability ratings (strategically, not operationally)
Representation and central contact partner for communication	Collects sustainability ideas from university members, informs central decision-making bodies about state of sustainability measures	Deals with press inquiries, university networks (e.g. LERU, DGHochN), university partnerships in the field of sustainability
Acquisition and advice on fundraising	Forwards incoming calls for interest, advises on topic of sustainability, coordinates grant applications	Communicates with project sponsors, submits grant applications for projects

Board – tasks
Decides on prioritizing of measures
Advises the Office manager on project management

Team Leads – tasks
Serve as domain experts for action areas
Strategic: identify challenges and discuss them with the Sustainability Office manager
Strategic: develop possible solutions with Office manager
Operational: manage implementation of prioritized individual measures for respective time period/sprint
Coordinate team meetings
Participate actively and constructively in Office meetings (e.g. weekly)

Teams – tasks
Implement the respective measures in defined period/sprint
Support team leads and report to them on state of implementation
Active and constructive attendance at team meetings

6. IMPRINT

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