



Business School

Keele Business School – Our Approach to Societal Impact

Introduction

Societal impact is integral to the Keele Business School (KBS) Vision of being a leading business school which:

‘transforms individual lives, enhances social bonds, and contributes to the creation of sustainable value’.

Our *Strategic Plan (2023-28)* sets-out the strong sense of purpose which shapes the KBS approach. This purpose means inspiring and preparing future leaders to act with social responsibility; to be a business school for businesses – supporting responsible growth; and contributing knowledge and opportunities to make positive societal impact in our local area, in what is a deprived region of the country.

Our approach to societal impact is underpinned by our Mission *‘to inspire future leaders through our diverse and entrepreneurial community environment to meet the demands of an ever-changing society, economy and world’*. This Mission is delivered through building excellence in teaching and research and creating the *‘impactful regional, national and international collaborations and partnerships’* through which to translate this excellence into real-world impacts. This is facilitated and informed by the innovative KBS approach to business engagement and knowledge exchange, which extends to physical co-location within the Business School building. The School’s Vision, Mission and KBS Strategic Plan, along with the Strategic Operating Plan, all drive our agenda and actions for positive societal impact.

KBS is a globally orientated business school, engaging with major societal challenges. However, we also play an important role within our region in supporting sustainable economic and business development, and in raising aspirations locally. This regional role is critical given the context that there are neighbourhoods close to the University which are among the 10 per cent most deprived in the country. While across the wider urban area of Newcastle-under-Lyme/Stoke-on-Trent there are a large number of areas among the most deprived 10 per cent nationally.

Context and approach

Keele University was born from a pioneering vision, one of a different kind of university, with a **commitment to meet the demands of a new kind of society, economy and world**. Established in 1949 by Lord Lindsay - the former Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University - in a country still recovering from the Second World War, the University's founding aim was to produce graduates who not only had the technical and specialist knowledge to move society forward, but who understood the social and political landscape that drove this need. The aim was to create a university that could address the educational needs of the local community and contribute to the region's social and economic development.

This original ethos remains at the core of the University's mission. The University's strategic plan, "Our Future," emphasizes five core tenets: **Purpose, People, Place, Partnerships, and Performance**. These principles guide Keele's efforts to deliver exceptional education and research, foster a strong sense of community, and maintain a global outlook while being rooted in its local context.

The University's strong commitment and strategic planning to make positive societal impact is embedded in the DNA of Keele Business School.

Our Values are focused on who we want to be as a School and how we inspire all stakeholders in our community – they are based on the six pillars that underpin all activities within the Keele Business School:

- Creative;
- Innovative;
- Enterprising;
- Sustainable;
- Ethical & Inclusive;
- Digitally Aware.

Business school activities that enable societal impact

Our Strategic Plan 2023-28: In the Business School, we have a strong sense of purpose. We have a purpose to ensure that we are inspiring and preparing future leaders to act with social responsibility. We have a purpose to be a business school for businesses. We have a purpose to contribute knowledge and opportunities to make positive societal impact and support economic growth, in what is a deprived region of the country.

This strong sense of purpose is important throughout this five-year strategy period, perhaps more so than ever, as we navigate the financial crisis currently facing the higher education sector and we evolve with the global challenges affecting people and businesses around the world. The School recognises the barriers and the aspirations of our local and wider region – and that is our first commitment to where our Business School can work collaboratively to make a difference. Our understanding of our purpose and our commitments are clearly visible in our Mission, Vision and our ambitious Strategy – and are being embedded throughout all activities within our School.

Six strategic objectives have been defined to task the School to make progress in order to realise its ambitious Mission and Vision, with each objective being supported by an enabling strategy and action plan. The six objectives are:



Education *and* Curriculum Delivery:

A continued commitment to create a cohesive & market facing portfolio of programmes, ensuring we are at the cutting edge of curriculum design and delivery to truly engage our learners. Our curriculum delivery will have employability embedded throughout with a strong emphasis on sustainability & digitalisation.



Research:

Our strategic focus on research will see us driving a vibrant research culture within the School; we will transform our research governance structures; we will work to grow our grant income; develop our post-graduate research provision and ensure that we enhance our future Research Excellence Framework (REF) performance through staff development and recruitment.



Business Engagement:

We will refocus and embed our engagement with businesses throughout all operations and activities of the School, to allow KBS to build towards becoming a business school for businesses. Our strategic focus will be to raise awareness of KBS regionally for business engagement and innovation by increasing the opportunities for engagement, support & partnerships.



Global Recognition – Accreditations *and* Rankings:

We will lay the foundation to raise the global recognition of the School, delivering our Vision, at a regional, national and international level through accreditations, rankings and international recognitions. We will work with global accreditations bodies and embed our accreditation strategy to ensure the School communicates its continuous improvement and societal impact.



Internationalisation:

A key strategic priority is to enhance the internationalisation of the School, which will see KBS not only continue to grow international student numbers, but also increase the international profile of the School and enhance the learner experience. The activities to deliver this objective focus on partnerships, programmes, staff and student mobility, as well as accreditation alignment.



People Plan *and* Resourcing:

We will reinvigorate our commitment to supporting and developing our staff to encourage high standards of excellence, whilst creating a physical space that ensures a vibrant workplace and business school environment. We will prepare and respond to sector challenges that could impact our resources and people, to position the School for long-term financial sustainability and success.

The work of KBS across these objectives is typified by a commitment to the real-world societal impacts of our actions and practices. While societal impact crosscuts KBS activities, the School has identified two areas of focus where our work can make the most meaningful difference. These areas are:

- **Responsible and Inclusive Business Growth**
- **Sustainability and Net Zero**

Our areas of focus for societal impact

The sustainable value articulated in the KBS Vision incorporates and integrates economic, social and environmental dimensions. This idea captures the core KBS approach to societal impact which is focused on the two themes of **‘Responsible and Inclusive Business Growth’** and **‘Sustainability and Net Zero’**.

Our work on **Responsible and Inclusive Business Growth** is aligned with SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth. KBS work in this area has international recognition, as evidenced by research publications in leading journals and collaboration in national and international networks; 15.6% of KBS publications are closely aligned to SDG 8.

Regionally this work is typified by the close nature of collaboration which has been established with local and regional businesses and other stakeholders, and the unique opportunities these collaborations offer for driving positive societal impact. KBS support for sustainable and inclusive local and regional economic growth is evidenced by a range of activities - including the direct delivery of business support for SMEs, using models of Knowledge Transfer to apply research insights to businesses engaging with important societal issues, and connecting students to businesses to jointly address business problems and to build enterprising and problem-solving skills among learners, thereby supporting the development of the future regional workforce.

Our second major area of focus is on **Sustainability and Net Zero**, which is closely aligned with SDG 13 – Climate Action. *Sustainable* is one of the six Pillars that underpin all activities in KBS, and our work under this strand embeds the KBS Vision of contributing to the creation of *‘sustainable value’*. KBS work on sustainability in this area is evidenced across our teaching, research and partnership activities; it also aligns with the activity at University level which has been globally recognised as sector leading. To facilitate the embedding of sustainability throughout KBS activities a new **Sustainability Academic Lead** role has been established in the Business School, and a **Sustainability Working Group** was tasked with developing a new *KBS Sustainability Strategy (2024-2029)*.

Progress in sustainability and Net Zero has included reviewing the curriculum to locate opportunities to embed sustainability-related content across all programmes. Financial investments have been made in developing our knowledge base. Staff development has included KBS support to undertake Carbon Literacy training. Research outputs have also increased, with KBS colleagues publishing 15 publications that align with SDG 13 (10.2% of all publications). Competitive funding has been received to work on impact-oriented interdisciplinary research working with partners on issues such identifying the regional and local skills needs for Net Zero and the development of current climate and sustainability strategies.

Responsible and Inclusive Business Growth

KBS are supporting the growth of local and regional SMEs through delivering a programme of tailored business support, supporting leadership through teaching and mentorship to grow businesses. This includes the **Help-to-Grow programme**. Help-to-Grow is a government-funded business support programme which is orientated to supporting SME growth. KBS was successful in tendering to deliver the programme regionally, in doing so addressing an important geographical gap in provision. Two cohorts (32 businesses) have completed the programme to date, with a third due to commence. To support regional growth, KBS has made an additional investment to subsidise participation in the programme and to enable more regional business to benefit.

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) play a pivotal role in the strategic mission of the School, bridging the gap between academia and industry. Through KTPs, KBS collaborates with businesses to drive innovation by embedding academic expertise within commercial settings. These partnerships enable businesses to address specific challenges while providing real-world opportunities for academic staff and students to apply their research. KTPs exemplify the School's commitment to enterprise by fostering mutual benefits: enhancing business performance and creating impactful research outputs.

Knowledge Exchange, learning, research and partnerships are brought-together in a physical space in the community through **Keele in Town**. Keele in Town is located in a building in Newcastle-Under-Lyme town centre high street, and represents the aim of fostering community and student engagement in the local area. Located off-campus, it serves as a central hub where students, local residents, and businesses can connect through events, workshops, and community programs. By bringing University resources and talents directly into town, it enhances accessibility, supports the local economy, and strengthens the bond between Keele University and the surrounding community. This represents strategic opportunity for KBS in societal impact, enhancing social bonds and contributing to the sustainable value of our local economy.

KBS has developed a model of **Student Consulting Projects** which focus on problem-solving in local businesses around areas such as innovation, efficiency and planning. These projects provide benefits to both students and local businesses – with 47 projects delivered in the past two years. The Student Consulting Project has been an integral part of Masters education across the suite of programmes at Keele Business School for over 10 years. The module provides students with the opportunity to work on live business problems supported by an academic supervisor and expertise drawn, as required, from the wider Business School team.

Supporting responsible and inclusive business growth also requires improving the qualifications base and building a broader culture of entrepreneurial ambition within the region. As described above, the University is located in an urban area with considerable deprivation, and locally less than 20 per cent of secondary school students go on to study at university. In response to this need KBS has developed **ICAN**, a programme designed to raise educational aspirations in local schools and colleges. ICAN is a group-based competition for students to engage with Business School academics and to design solutions to contemporary business problems, and in doing so to build entrepreneurial experience and aspiration within the region. There is an ambition to achieve 100 staff-student engagements through ICAN.

Beyond business growth, KBS societal impact extends to responsible and inclusive business practices. KBS has supported the establishment of the **Staffordshire Black Business Network (SBBN)**, a network developed to support Black-owned businesses in the local area. This has included facilitating a series of networking events, including linking businesses with local members of parliament and the Chamber of Commerce. The network has supported several members to access funding to support business growth.

KBS has also developed wider stakeholder partnerships (including with Government, Unions, employer-bodies) to support societal impact around decent work. KBS research has underpinned the

development of a regional '**Good Work Charter**' which is being taken-forward in partnership with regional stakeholders.

Sustainability and meeting Net Zero needs

In respect of KBS societal impact on **sustainability and net zero** (SDG 13 – Climate Action), funding has been provided for staff to complete **Carbon Literacy Training** to increase staff knowledge in this area. The Carbon Literacy Project training, which was developed by the Carbon Literacy Trust, is concerned with developing 'awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis'. This awareness is built through a facilitated one-day training session and subsequent assessment which once completed awards individuals with certification of their carbon literacy. To date, 14 staff (including one facilitator) are now certified Carbon Literate (this is more than a quarter of KBS staff).

Sustainability has also been an important and growing part of research and knowledge exchange activities. Competitive funding has been received to work on interdisciplinary research on sustainability. CPD sessions on green finance and Net Zero supply-chains are being delivered for employers (mostly SMEs from the local area).

Our Societal Impact Plan: 2025-2027

Our **Societal Impact Plan (2025-2027)** describes the next steps of our work on societal impact focused on the themes of 'Responsible and Inclusive Business Growth' and 'Sustainability and Net Zero'.

Our plans for developments in these areas are detailed in the following tables (Table 1 and Table 2). Our curriculum activities include continuing to develop the provision of Student Consulting Projects and an interconnected set of actions which place sustainability as a central aspect of course provision. Our scholarship activities will include growing the publication base, research projects and international recognition of KBS research in the themes of 'Responsible and Inclusive Business Growth' and 'Sustainability and Net Zero'. Scholarship activities will also improve staff knowledge around generating impact and embed and extend partnerships with stakeholders outside the University to drive our societal impact. Our engagement activities will connect to a diverse range of different stakeholder groups including businesses, policymakers and young people. In the Tables we also provide a set of short-term measures which can help us to assess our progress. These build on our existing experiences and progress in these areas.

Table 1: KBS Societal Impact Plan: Responsible and inclusive business growth. 2025–2027

Goal	Objective	Approach	Short-term measures
Grow and deliver student placements	Supporting applied and impactful experiences for students which connect classroom-based learning to real-world problem solving.	Further embed existing business relationships and expand the number of businesses engaged with.	<p>Student Consulting to be offered within existing courses, engaging at least 30 students in real-world business projects. Consulting will also be embedded in new courses as they are introduced, targeting 2–3 new course integrations to broaden experiential learning opportunities.</p> <p>Workshops and training to expand the supervision pool, aiming to recruit at least 5 new academic and industry supervisors.</p> <p>Employability surveys to be deployed before and after consulting projects, with the target of demonstrating a measurable improvement in student confidence and workplace readiness.</p>
<p>Disseminate learning from current research projects through presentations, intellectual contributions and accessible formats for stakeholders (business, policymakers, government).</p> <p>Embed and extend partnerships with stakeholders outside the University to increase the influence of research in this area.</p>	<p>Present the findings of current research in a range of high-profile forums to effectively disseminate findings and lessons.</p> <p>Increase the knowledge-base among staff of partnerships and writing for societal impact.</p>	<p>Identify staff currently working in this area and potential partners and collaborators.</p> <p>Identify funding sources to support engagement and impact activities with stakeholders.</p> <p>Provide time for staff to work on research outputs.</p>	<p>Two peer-reviewed academic papers will be submitted for publication.</p> <p>Two other forms of practice-focused knowledge dissemination contributions to be published.</p> <p>A Workshop is held on research for societal impact.</p>
<p>To deliver aspiration-raising activities for young people within the local area.</p> <p>To support the growth prospects of local and regional businesses through</p>	<p>To successfully deliver the ICAN initiative through a structure of site visits to participating schools and a finals event at the Business School.</p> <p>To successfully deliver the provision of business</p>	<p>Identify partner schools to promote ICAN opportunity and work with these to effectively deliver the programme.</p> <p>To identify opportunities (such as use of facilities and potential funding</p>	<p>100 ICAN engagements achieved.</p> <p>34 businesses to be supported through the Help-to-Grow programme.</p>

the provision of business support. To facilitate inclusive business and enterprise outcomes. To successful launch and build the business and enterprise support delivered through the investment in 'Keele in Town'.	support through the Help-to-Grow programme. To support the development of the work and impact of the Staffordshire Black Business Network (SBBN) - including utilising new research insights and knowledge exchange.	streams) to support the network development of SBBN and to enhance the scope of engagement with these businesses across the wider University.	Two network events to be supported for the SBBN and links facilitated to other relevant parts of the institution (such as the Law School and specialisms in commercial law).
--	---	---	--

Table 2: KBS Societal Impact Plan: Sustainability and Net Zero. 2025–2027

Goal	Objective	Approach	Short-term measures
Embed sustainability content across business school programmes.	<p>Developing learners' knowledge and skills to facilitate more sustainable outcomes in business.</p> <p>Provide students with SDGs awareness, knowledge and reflection opportunities.</p>	<p>Assess course content to ensure sustainability-related content and approaches are embedded in core curriculum</p> <p>Facilitate training on climate literacy for staff.</p> <p>Develop internal staff training on how to embed UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development competencies in the curriculum.</p>	<p>Design / redesign modules for staggered learning of sustainability topics. This will include the identification of relevant SDGs and inclusion of these in student module handbooks.</p> <p>Support students' development of sustainability related projects, whether as part of consultancy, placement opportunities, coursework, or volunteering activities. Roll-out new 'Sustainability measuring and reporting' module at Masters' level.</p> <p>Ensure student representation as KBS Green Ambassadors in the KBS Sustainability Group meetings and related initiatives.</p> <p>Undertake before and after surveys of students' sustainability knowledge with the aim of increasing awareness of the links between</p>

			<p>sustainability skills with employability.</p> <p>Conduct focus groups with staff to assess sustainability knowledge gaps, and deliver training to facilitate the embedding of UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development competencies in the curriculum</p> <p>Aim for 50 per cent of staff to be certified Carbon Literate.</p>
Promote the participation of staff on sustainability research projects.	Build the reputation and influence of KBS in sustainability.	<p>Engage with the Institute for Sustainable Futures to identified interdisciplinary research opportunities.</p> <p>Identify opportunities to disseminate pedagogical learning from implementation of sustainability actions.</p>	<p>Two peer-reviewed academic papers to be submitted for publication.</p> <p>Interdisciplinary outputs to be developed, such as with the University research institutes.</p>
Facilitate the establishment of external partnerships for collaboration on sustainability issues.	Connect research and pedagogical learning to stakeholders for impact.	Engage with regional partners and stakeholder networks targeted at sustainability practice.	<p>To actively identify opportunities to collaborate with businesses to inform and influence sustainability policy and practice, both through existing contracts and broader engagement. Through these collaborations, students will gain experience of real-world sustainability challenges, applying their knowledge to drive positive environmental and social impact. Targets include engaging with at least 10 existing business partners to integrate sustainability initiatives and establishing 5 new external collaborations that support sustainability-focused student projects.</p>