



Nottingham University
Business School

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Nottingham University Business School Societal Impact Statement





Contents

Context and Purpose - The 'why'	3
Key underpinning concepts – The 'what'	5
Approach – The 'How'	8
Business School Societal Impact Focus Areas	8
Nottingham University Business School Enabling Activities	9
Framework for developing the Societal Impact Plan	11
Appendix: Nottingham University Business School Vision (2024)	12

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Wedding Cake Model of the SDGs (Stockholm Resilience Institute, 2016)	5
Table 1. Business School Societal Impact Focus Areas	8
Table 2. Business School Enabling Activities and Pathways to Impact	9
Table 3. Framework for Nottingham University Business School's Societal Impact Plan (based on Theory of Change)	11



Context and Purpose – The ‘why’

Global societal problems such as the climate crisis, social and health inequalities cannot be overcome by governments or single organisations working alone. All organisations, including businesses, are required to be proactive in how they engage with and respond to these challenges. Consequently, business schools, which educate the next generation of responsible leaders and the changemakers of tomorrow, also carry a major responsibility for their preparation and readiness. At the University of Nottingham, we recognise our responsibilities and contribution.

At Nottingham University Business School, we take this responsibility for society and the environment to heart. We are convinced that impact has become an important measurement for business and management education legitimacy and therefore ensure that our degree programmes go beyond traditional business education, which emphasises financial performance, economic growth and centres for-profit/commercial organisations. We work to sharpen our students' conscious awareness of the world around us, teach them more inclusive strategies and solutions, and inspire them to choose work opportunities with a societal and environmental impact.

The purpose of the Societal Impact Statement is to provide the clarity in direction needed to increase our impact where our local context and the world need it most. This will allow the business school to:

Amplify – Design a cohesive and coordinated approach around a shared purpose. The alignment of strategic priorities and activities will drive momentum.

Differentiate – Differentiate ourselves on parameters that really matter, with specific impact proof points that distinguish our brand.

Engage – Rally our whole community, local and global, around purposeful causes and reinforce our sense of pride and aspiration.

Learn – Measure and evaluate our impact to ensure we continually optimise our contributions.



We aim to create positive change for people and planet through our research, teaching and learning activities, external engagement, internal governance, and operations. We strive to ensure the flourishing of all through an ethics of care and reflexive approach and a focus on contributing meaningfully to contextually relevant issues and perspectives.



The key questions we ask are:

- Where can we deliver positive impact where it matters most locally and globally?
- What distinct capabilities (existing and new) will enable our impact?
- What do we want to achieve and learn and how will we measure our progress?

The Societal Impact Statement will inform the development of the Business School Societal Impact Plan, which will:

1. Identify where we can concentrate our efforts for greatest positive impact.
2. Outline our unique capabilities as well as those we wish to develop that enable our impact.
3. Define how we will measure and learn from our progress.





Key underpinning concepts – The ‘what’

The rest of this document sets out our path towards impact, or in other words, a framework for how we want to think about and approach societal impact as part of what we do. To develop this statement, several decisions have been made to provide the necessary scope and fundamental assumptions upon which to develop the Societal Impact Framework. There is a proliferation of concepts, theories and frameworks around impact, societal value, responsible businesses, etc. Here we draw specifically on the following:

Ecological Worldview

From this perspective “people deeply embody an understanding that they are part of a complex web of existence (including the rest of life) and not separate from it.” (Buckton et al., 2023: 8). The cited work synthesises extant research considering human-nature relationships and stems from a long research tradition on socio-ecological transitions. An ecological worldview translates into the promotion of reflexivity, a commitment to strong sustainability and collaborative efforts to map internal and external systems and their relationship, i.e. how they affect each other, with a long-term lens.

Flourishing

We build on the work of Ehrenfeld and Hoffman (2013) and Ehrenfeld (2019) who have conceptualised flourishing as ‘the realization of living creatures’ biological—and for humans, existential—potential.’ This requires consideration of the larger social and environmental systems in which people live out their lives, and a recognition that all living things are interconnected in complex systems and require caring relations and actions for all things to flourish together. Flourishing is considered an emergent property, ‘a possibility that may be realized when the proper systemic conditions are present’ (Ehrenfeld, 2019: 107), as opposed to a material output. It requires working towards getting the systems conditions right, and as such encouraging questioning of the fundamental assumptions of the current systems. Through integrating consideration for flourishing, this statement therefore emphasises not the achievement or pursuit of material outputs and measures but rather the emergent and aspirational nature of societal impact and the requirement to engage in critical questioning.



Figure 1. Wedding Cake Model of the SDGs (Stockholm Resilience Institute, 2016)



Building on the ecological worldview and the concept of *flourishing* and integrating our institutional commitment at UoN to the Sustainable Development Goals, naturally leads towards our adoption of this framework. It shows a hierarchy between priorities whereby the biosphere – the global ecosystem of all living things – underpins a healthy and flourishing society, which in turn enables a prosperous economy.

Commitment to protecting and respecting Human Rights

Here we refer to [The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) and assert that our trajectory towards creating positive impact for people and planet is grounded in a fundamental respect for human rights and a commitment to respecting them in all we do and through our work with others, including ensuring no abuse exist though the adoption of appropriate policies and procedures. The UN declaration on [‘the right to a clean and healthy environment’](#) links to our adopted ecological worldview.

Education for Sustainable Development through Competencies, Values and Actions

Finally, with the recognition that education is a core aspect of what we do and of how we can deliver positive impact, we build upon frameworks that go beyond the promotion of ‘knowledge as content’ for sustainability and recognise the importance of behaviours, values, and actions. Namely these frameworks are the Competency-based framework and the Inner Development Goals, which draw on the pedagogical model of Head, Heart and Hands.

UNESCO Key competencies are:

- Systems-thinking competency
- Anticipatory (futures)-thinking competency
- Normative (values)-thinking competency
- Strategic-thinking competency
- Collaboration competency
- Critical-thinking competency
- Self-awareness competency
- Integrated problem-solving competency

The Inner Development Goals include five dimensions:

- **Being** - relationship to self
- **Thinking** - cognitive skills
- **Relating** - caring for others and the world
- **Collaborating** - social skills
- **Acting** - enabling change



Desirability

At the heart of Nottingham University Business School's Societal Impact work lies a consideration for creating positive impact and hence an assumption that we will be able to evaluate how 'positive' or 'desirable' the impact we have created is. In order to support such evaluation, we integrate a constant interrogation of the direction taken by our work, and whether it will lead to a desirable future inspired by the concept *phronetic* research proposed by Flyvbjerg (2001), which in turn comes from phronesis, a term borrowed from Aristotelian philosophy (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Cassell et al., 2009). **This translates into the following evaluative questions:**

- **Where are we going?**
- **Is this development desirable?**
- **What, if anything, should we do about it?**
- **Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?**



Approach – The ‘How’

We have embarked on a journey towards increasing our impact, working to develop our own, unique impact model - much like our vision, mission and our values are unique to us. Inspired by the *Theory of Change* process, we have made room for a bottom-up approach, talking to and listening to our stakeholders about what they think is important. We adopt a collaborative approach with our broad community, engaging with our advisory boards and groups, staff, students, alumni, businesses and so many more, to jointly discuss and develop a framework that suits us, that is reflective of our values and that allows us to systematically create impact over future years.

Impact has become increasingly important in addressing the purpose and value of a modern international business school. At Nottingham, we have moved on from business school impact performance being measured primarily in terms of ‘league table’ outputs (e.g. citation counts and media rankings) rather than through assessment of meaningful outcomes relative to societal impact (which cannot be measured quite as succinctly and neatly as performance metrics and media rankings).

The Societal Impact Plan will embrace the concepts outlined above, show progress against selected key Impact Focus Areas and will be reviewed annually to ensure it accurately reflects local and global socio-environmental needs.

It will be informed by consultation, data analysis, cross sector research into best practice, and the recommendations and insights from UoN strategy, the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings data, the PRME SIP questionnaire, the Positive Impact Rating and the ongoing work to develop the new business school strategy through the Quality Enhancement Programme and Reputation Enhancement Programme.

The three core areas of our societal impact and associated focus areas* are outlined in a hierarchy below.

Biosphere	Our focus will be on protecting and increasing biodiversity (both terrestrial and marine – SDGs 14 and 15) and fostering climate resilience (SDG 13).
Society	Our focus will be on promoting and ensuring justice, diversity, equity and inclusion (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11 and 16) .
Economy	Our focus will be on driving prosperity for all through supporting transparency and championing sustainable business models and finance (SDG 10)

Table 1. NUBS Societal Impact Focus Areas



Business School Enabling Activities

In the table below, we outline Nottingham University Business School’s key enabling activity areas and how they can be leveraged to deliver on our societal impact focus areas.

Research

Teaching & Learning

External Engagement

Internal Governance and Operations

Pathways to Impact	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovery and new knowledge • Inform public debate • Influence on Governments • Improved or new practices, processes and products in businesses and organisations • Behaviour change through inclusive research • Creation of new ventures 	<p>An increase in the number of publications of research by NUBS academics that consider biodiversity.</p> <p>Contribution to cultural life of the community by hosting a public event about sustainable finance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased knowledge and understanding • Enhanced skills and competencies • Reflexive graduates with strong positive values and attitudes • Increased sense of agency and ability to drive change • Diverse and inclusive educational environments • Support the students to become change agents and entrepreneurs for social good 	<p>Our graduates will nurture and demonstrate values of respect for nature, integrity, empathy etc. enabled by activities like our teaching approaches (group learning and assessment, reflexivity embedded etc.).</p> <p>Participation in challenge-based projects with the local community in line with our focus areas</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convening power to share knowledge and bring different parties/actors together • Meaningful and values-driven partnerships and networks • User-centred approach and design • Advocacy and storytelling • Knowledge exchange, consultancy and placements as conduits for cultural exchange (both organisational culture and global culture) 	<p>Nurturing and establishing partnerships with organisations that share our commitments and values and refraining from engaging with those that do not.</p> <p>Appearances in campaigns, media and other publicly available materials and events in relation to work on our impact areas</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff wellbeing and flourishing • Community wellbeing and flourishing • Environmental impact monitoring and proactive reduction • Regenerative policies and practices centring on planet and people for our estates, catering and finance • Governance structure based on accountability and transparency • Organisational culture and values rooted in ecological worldview, ethics of care and reflexivity • Leadership commitment to drive positive societal impact 	<p>Development, implementation and evaluation of ethical and sustainable investment strategy</p> <p>Reduction of the carbon footprint of our catering through sustainable procurement approach</p> <p>Sustainable travel policies and incentives for choosing not to fly.</p> <p>Inclusive recruitment policies and practices through training and competency-based approaches</p>

Table 2. Business School Enabling Activities and Pathways to Impact



Framework for developing the Societal Impact Plan

In the table below, we outline Nottingham University Business School’s key enabling activity areas and how they can be leveraged to deliver on our societal impact focus areas. We outline some examples of the activities and questions we should be undertaking and asking to ensure that our activities enable societal impact.

Table 3. Framework for Business School Societal Impact Plan (based on Theory of Change)

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Priorities (Outcomes)	Impact Focus Areas
People (staff, students, alumni, other) Knowledge Data Equipment Facilities Funds Partnerships Other	Research Teaching and Learning External Engagement Internal Governance and Operations			Biosphere: Biodiversity and Climate Resilience Society: Justice and EDI Economy: Prosperity for all, Transparency, Sustainable Business Models

The proposed next stages of the work will focus on the following:

1. Receiving and integrating feedback from Nottingham University Business School UK, China and Malaysia exec teams on Societal Impact Statement
2. Establishing Business School Societal Impact tri-campus team to steer and develop the Societal Impact Plan, with formal mechanisms to report to and engage with business school senior leadership teams at each campus to enable strategic decisions and actions (e.g. Societal Impact Lead at each campus to attend and contribute to School Exec meetings)
3. Run consultations with our communities of staff, students, alumni and advisory board to define and articulate our priorities (or Outcomes) in line with our Impact Focus Areas
4. Integrate findings from the consultations to draft the tri-campus Societal Impact Plan



Appendix: Business School Vision (2024)

Our vision at Nottingham University Business School is to be a global leader in business education, shaping the future of responsible business and management in an interconnected world. We aspire to deliver an unparalleled learning experience that transforms our students into visionary leaders and change-makers.

Our goal is to be recognised as one of the top 50 business schools in the world, renowned for our excellence in teaching, research, and thought leadership. We will leverage our unique tri-campus, global character to provide a truly immersive educational experience that prepares our students to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing business landscape.

At Nottingham University Business School, we believe that innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and ethics are essential components of responsible business practices. We aim to inspire and empower our students to become global citizens who are committed to making a positive impact on society.

We are committed to advancing the frontiers of knowledge through ground-breaking research and thought leadership, and to disseminating our findings to the wider community. Our actions will reflect our unwavering commitment to excellence, integrity, and leadership in all that we do.

At Nottingham University Business School, we are dedicated to creating a brighter future for our students, our staff, our community, and the world. By fostering a culture of excellence, collaboration, and innovation, we believe we can achieve our vision and make a lasting impact on the world of business.





Nottingham University
Business School

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Find out more:

nott.ac/business-societalimpact



Email: LI-NUBS-comms@nottingham.ac.uk

 nott.ac/business

 @NottmUniBsSchool

 @nottingham-university-business-school



PRME Principles for Responsible
Management Education
an initiative of the United Nations Global Compact



The University of Nottingham has made every effort to ensure that the information in this brochure was accurate when published. Please note, however, that the nature of the content means that it is subject to change, and you should therefore consider the content to be guiding, rather than definitive.

© University of Nottingham. All rights reserved. Printed October 2024.