

A practical briefing for
improving sustainability
rankings in UK Higher
Education



Sustainability rankings guide

MossMetrics
CONSULTANCY

mossmetrics.com

Helping universities strengthen sustainability rankings through clearer evidence, strategic alignment, and ranking-specific insight.

Sustainability rankings are a strategic priority

A university's league table position increasingly influences institutional reputation, student recruitment, research partnerships, and funding opportunities. What was once viewed as a specialist sustainability exercise is now a visible indicator of institutional credibility and long-term strategic direction.

As expectations around environmental and social impact continue to rise, rankings such as the QS World Sustainability Rankings, THE Impact Ratings, and the People & Planet University League are playing a growing role in how universities are perceived by prospective students, staff, partners, and policymakers.

Yet many institutions still under-perform - not because they lack meaningful sustainability activity, but because their evidence, policies, governance structures, and narratives are not aligned with ranking methodologies. In most cases, the challenge is not substance. It is strategic presentation, coordination, and visibility.

Understanding the major sustainability rankings

QS Sustainability Rankings

Measures environmental impact, sustainability research, equality, employability, governance, and institutional strategy.

Many universities already perform strongly but struggle to provide the evidence.

THE Impact Ratings

Focused on performance against the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including research, teaching, outreach, and partnerships.

Strong submissions require clear narratives and well-developed case studies.

People and Planet

A UK-specific ranking covering environmental management, ethical investment, carbon reduction, workers' rights, and education for sustainable development.

Small policy or visibility issues can significantly reduce scores.



Case Study: From unranked to World Top 100

A mid-sized UK university moved from unranked status into the global Top 100 of the THE Impact Rankings within four years.

The institution already had strong sustainability activity in place, but evidence was fragmented and they found the methodology complex.

By introducing a more structured submission process, improving policy visibility, and strengthening SDG case studies, the university achieved substantial ranking gains.

Quick wins

- Create a central evidence repository for policies, data, and case studies
- Review and update publicly available sustainability policies
- Map sustainability initiatives consistently against SDGs
- Improve visibility of governance structures and commitments
- Identify low-effort, high-impact scoring opportunities



Sustainability teams across UK higher education often face limited internal capacity, complex methodologies, and growing pressure to demonstrate year-on-year progress.

External consultancy support helps institutions benchmark performance, identify overlooked opportunities, reduce submission burden, and focus effort where it will deliver measurable results.

How MossMetrics can help

We can help with improving sustainability league table performance, reducing the burden of evidence gathering and submission, and help with showcasing sustainability achievements more effectively.

- QS, THE, and People & Planet methodology snapshots
- Evidence review and gap analysis
- Benchmarking and insights
- Quick-win recommendations
- Narrative and case study development
- Strategic rankings improvement planning

We offer tailored consultancy packages - from rapid, baseline audits to detailed analysis and benchmarking.

Book a free 15 minute consultation or request more information mossmetrics.com