

Sustainable development at the University of Bern

Sustainability Report 2022/23

By Noah Suter and Nicole Wagenblast



Foreword by the Vice-Rector for Quality and Sustainable Development

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The University of Bern sees sustainability as a key responsibility and an opportunity to actively shape the future. This Sustainability Report covers the years 2022 and 2023, and reflects our successes, challenges and continuous progress along this path. It documents how we combine and promote environmental, social and economic sustainability in research, teaching and operations – because we understand sustainability comprehensively and include all three dimensions.

In a time of global challenges, the University of Bern remains committed to its role as a leading research institution to develop innovative and sustainable solutions. This commitment is reflected in our efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, advances in the sustainable use of energy and resources, and in the promotion of inter- and transdisciplinary research that transcends academic boundaries.

I have been working as Vice-Rector for Quality and Sustainable Development since August 2023, and I am impressed by the numerous projects in the areas of quality assurance and development, sustainable development, integration and equal opportunities. Diversity is one of the strengths of our University, and in order to promote an innovative and creative environment, a dedicated focus on quality, equal opportunities, and sustainable development is needed.

Special thanks go to the students and employees of the University, whose commitment and creativity contribute to integrating sustainability into our day-to-day practice. Their efforts reinforce our belief that knowledge not only creates value, but also means responsibility.

This report invites you to gain an insight into our measures and successes while we continue to strive to make the University of Bern an even more sustainable university. Together, we want to make the University of Bern a place where learning, research and working are in harmony with our ethical and environmental obligations.

Heike Mayer



Prof. Dr. Heike Mayer, Vice-Rector for Quality and Sustainable Development

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1. Introduction

1.1 The University of Bern and its vision

With around 20,000 students and around 8,000 employees, the University of Bern is the third-largest university in Switzerland. Founded in 1834, it is now consistently ranked among the top 200 universities in the world in the best-known international university rankings and occupies a leading position worldwide in selected fields of research. As a full-scale university, the University of Bern has eight faculties, around 150 institutes and ten interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary strategic centers. It creates the best possible teaching, learning and research conditions for personal fulfillment and the development of the high level of professional skills of all its members. As a place of education, research and culture, it contributes to public life and maintains dialog with political authorities and institutions.

The vision of the University of Bern can be summed up in three words: **KNOWLEDGE CREATES VALUE**. It illustrates the overriding social developments to which the University of Bern is oriented and the mission it has to fulfill.

Knowledge is one of the most important resources we have as a society and will continue to increase in significance in future. Knowledge is the key to solving the problems facing society and dealing with global challenges. Universities make an indispensable contribution to the development and transfer of knowledge.

In December 2021, the University of Bern's [Strategy 2030](#) was approved by the University Executive Board. With this, it wants to continue the successes to date and at the same time respond to new challenges. The five key areas form a sub-strategy. The University of Bern distinguishes itself both nationally and internationally with excellent research and teaching, particularly in several key areas that represent particular strengths for the University and are of major social and economic significance. One of these key areas for the University of Bern is the area of **sustainability**: "The University of Bern carries out excellent interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and teaching on sustainability (ecology, society, economy, culture and climate)."

In addition, sustainability plays an important role in the functional strategies that are central to the University's ability to function.

1.2 Sustainability at the University of Bern

Sustainable development is a long-term, optimistic guiding principle for how society should develop, centered on people and their needs, abilities, and actions. Crucially, it envisions inter- and intragenerational social and economic justice, while respecting the environmental limits of natural resource use. This interdisciplinary task requires contributions at all levels of decision-making. For this reason, co-determination and participation are a core principle of sustainable development. Ideally, all actors agree on and coordinate their specific goals and measures as part of an overall vision. Viewed in this way, sustainable development is a continuous process of negotiation and compromise to balance and coordinate diverse environmental, social, and economic interests, and to settle conflicts of interest consensually and peacefully. However, this participation requires players to possess the relevant knowledge and be able to act accordingly, or be enabled to do so. In addition to appropriate institutional frameworks, research and education are key.

The University Executive Board has included sustainable development in its [mission statement](#), vision and [Strategy 2030](#), and has anchored responsibility in the Vice-Rectorate Quality and Sustainable Development. An [Office for Sustainable Development](#) was created on June 1, 2012. In addition, since spring 2012, the

University of Bern has had a permanent [Commission for Sustainable Development](#) on which all faculties, the University Executive Board, intermediate staff, the students as well as the administrative directorate and the CDE (Centre for Development and Environment) are represented. In January 2017, the University Executive Board adopted the [Mission Statement for Sustainability](#) of the University of Bern.

1.3 Sustainability reporting

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As places of knowledge generation and transfer, it is a university's duty to contribute to sustainable development in research and teaching. As organizations, they are also required to use ecological, economic and social resources carefully. Since 2015, the University of Bern has been conducting annual monitoring to record its commitment to sustainability in the areas of research, teaching, operations and social affairs. The results of the sustainability monitoring are published every two years as the University's Sustainability Report. This report covers the sustainability monitoring results for 2022 and 2023.



University of Bern Main building

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2. Research

2.1 Research profile

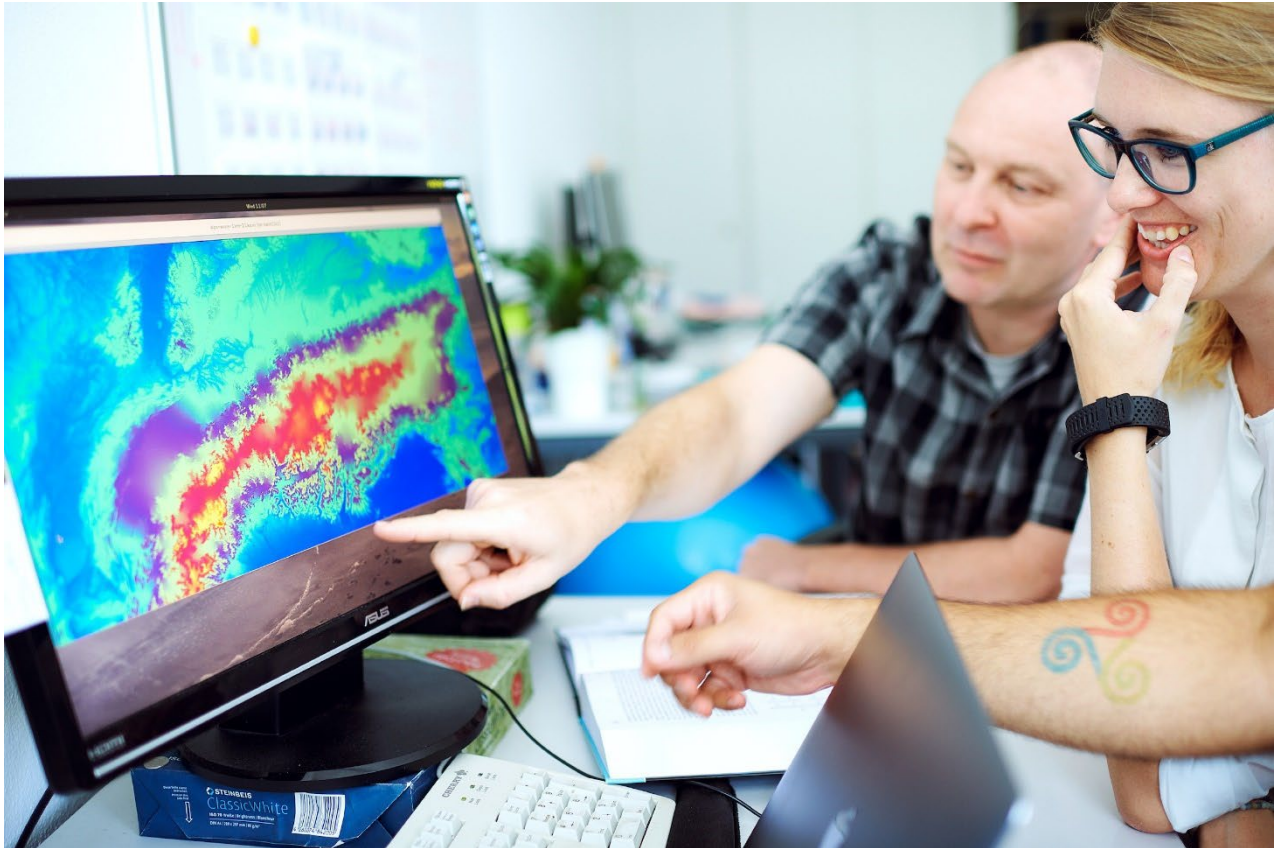
The University of Bern has defined five key areas in its research activities that are of major social and scientific importance. It intends to use its competences to make a special commitment in these areas. The University's position as a full-scale university makes it possible to address these issues from a number of disciplinary approaches and in inter- or transdisciplinary teams. The University of Bern has set one of these priorities in the area of sustainability and uses its potential to make a substantial contribution to researching and shaping sustainable development. It conducts excellent disciplinary, inter- and transdisciplinary research and teaching with an international focus on topics such as climate, managing global change (north-south) and trade regulation. Other topics, such as biodiversity and the sustainable use of resources, as well as Gender Studies are also in focus.

The University of Bern promotes sustainability research within the context of specialized, interdisciplinary research centers and, at the faculties, with corresponding professorships. The sustainability-related research centers include:

- The [Centre for Development and Environment \(CDE\)](#) is the Swiss center of excellence for sustainable development. As one of the strategic centers of the University of Bern, it is mandated with anchoring sustainability throughout the University's research and teaching activities. The CDE puts its research and teaching at the service of a future-proof world. The aim is to work out ways to achieve sustainable development and initiate transformation processes in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda.
- The [Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research \(OCCR\)](#) is the University of Bern's center of excellence for climate research. With its research on climate change and its effects on humans and ecosystems, the interdisciplinary research center makes an important contribution to sustainable development. The OCCR also considers the social dimensions of these unprecedented changes and provides scientific information to decision-makers and society – from the regional to the international level.
- The [World Trade Institute \(WTI\)](#) conducts research and teaches at the interface between law, economics and political sciences. As one of the leading academic institutes for interdisciplinary research on global trade and investment regulations, economic globalization and sustainable development, the WTI contributes to a better understanding of the legal, economic and political framework of globalization and sustainable development.
- As an interdisciplinary network, the [Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies \(ICFG\)](#) bundles the gender expertise of the University of Bern and operates as a center of excellence for inter- and transdisciplinary gender research at the interface between academia and practice.
- The [Wyss Academy for Nature](#), a world-leading research and implementation center in the field of nature and humans was established at the University of Bern in 2020: Teams of scientists have joined forces with experts and representatives from the fields of politics, business and civil society on four continents to develop innovations aimed at protecting nature and ensuring its sustainable use. The implementation-oriented applications, strategies and policy guidelines will be tested at the hubs of the Wyss Academy and extended to other regions. The way the different stakeholders cooperate is

also new: It breaks up the conventional silos of science, nature conservation, development cooperation and political routine. In this way, scientific findings are applied quickly and can take effect.

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OCCR – Earth System Modelling

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2.2 Promotion of research

The University of Bern creates framework conditions that are conducive to sustainability research. It does this by promoting sustainability research at specialized research centers and at faculties with corresponding professorships. In the reporting period, new professorships and endowed lectureships were added to the numerous existing professorships with an explicit focus on sustainability. In 2023, Christoph Oberlack was appointed Associate Professor of Sustainability Governance. The newly created professorship is located at the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) and is associated with the Department of Social Sciences of the Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Sciences. In addition, the University Executive Board appointed Quynh Nguyen Associate Professor of Environmental Governance and Global Development in 2023 with the main tasks being carried out at the Wyss Academy for Nature. In her research, Quynh Nguyen addresses global societal challenges, in particular the political and social effects of climate change and the consequences of economic globalization processes.

Alongside promoting specialized research centers and professorships related to sustainability, the University of Bern regularly awards research prizes. The following sustainability prizes were awarded in the reporting years:

- **[Bernese Award for Environmental Research](#)**: Every two years, researchers at the University of Bern are honored for outstanding academic work that makes a socially relevant contribution or

provides a basis for a better understanding of environmental and sustainability problems or their solutions and provides food for thought for practical applications. In 2023, the Bernese Award for Environmental Research was awarded for the 14th time. The winners were Dr. Nicolas C.A. Lentz and Fabienne Wöhner.

The work of Nicolas C.A. Lentz demonstrates that formic acid is an exceptionally active catalyst that serves as the key to the realization of the hydrogen economy. Fabienne Wöhner analyzed Swiss traffic behavior in connection with the increasing flexibility of the labor market. In doing so, she shows that social change, such as the more flexible labor market, can also lead to unexpected consequences, such as more traffic for leisure and shopping purposes.

- **Barbara Lischetti award:** Every two years, early career researchers at the University of Bern are honored for an outstanding dissertation that addresses a gender research topic or uses a related approach. In 2022, Dr. Laura Perler was the winner of the Barbara Lischetti award. In her dissertation, she analyses the interdependencies of the two techniques of egg donation and reproductive genetics in relation to the Spanish egg donation economy.

2.3 Academic expertise in dialog and as an innovative force

2.3.1 Academic expertise in the regional and global context

The University of Bern makes its competencies in the field of sustainable development available to institutions in administration, politics and business as well as to the public, thus acting as an innovative force in the regional and global context: The CDE advises and supports public and private clients in all matters relating to sustainable transformation, specifically in the implementation of the global [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and in relation to the research priorities of the University of Bern. In doing so, the CDE links issues at global, national and local level and supports cross-sectoral approaches to solutions.

However, the researchers at the University of Bern not only provide their academic expertise within the framework of services, but also contribute it within international committees.

- Bern's climate and sustainability research has a long tradition of preparing reports for the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#). For example, Dr. Carolina Adler from the CDE collaborated on the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC, published March 1, 2022.
- In mid-February 2022, CDE scientist Theresa Tribaldos was appointed holder of the [UNESCO Chair on Natural and Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Mountain Development](#) by the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris. She succeeds Stephan Rist. The UNESCO Chair is based at the CDE and the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern and is co-directed by CETRAD in Kenya.
- Since 2023, Prof. Martin Grosjean (Director of the OCCR) has been co-chair of the international research network [PAGES](#) (Past Global Challenges) together with Zhimian Jian from China. PAGES is the most important international network for researching the climate of the past and brings together 5,000 researchers from 120 countries. On June 1, 2023, the "International Symposium on Past Global Changes: Lessons for a Sustainable Future 2023" took place at the University of Bern. The international network is headquartered at the University of Bern.

2.3.2 Research related to the Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, the UN member states adopted the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). It is a common concept for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. At its core are the 17 Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), which are to be achieved through global cooperation between all industrialized, emerging and developing countries.

As part of its 2024 research assessment, the [Research Management Office](#) of the University of Bern conducted an analysis of the research projects at the University of Bern with reference to the 17 SDGs for the first time. The analysis is based on project data from the research information platform Dimensions¹. To this end, all projects from 2022 and 2023 in which the University of Bern was involved were analyzed², whether as a primary investigator or co-investigator. The results clearly show that interdisciplinary research, particularly that of the centers, has made a strong contribution to the peaks in SDG Goals 3 “*Good Health and Well Being*”, 13 “*Climate Action*” and 16 “*Peace Justice and Strong Institutions*” (see Figure 1). This illustrates that the research activities of the University of Bern are contributing to the major challenges of the 21st century.

SDG categories of research projects funded at the University of Bern



Figure 1: SDG categories of funded research projects at UniBE; evaluations and graphics from the Research Management Office, Vice-Rectorate Research and Innovation

¹ Dimensions is a comprehensive research information platform that integrates and links various data sources such as publications, citations, patents, clinical trials and grants. Dimensions enables data-driven analytics to visualize research activities, identify trends and gain insights into scientific impact metrics.

² The analysis is based on data from Dimensions and does not claim to be exhaustive. The research projects listed in Dimensions and linked to UniBE are divided into research directions by Dimensions and assigned to the SDGs.

SDG by fields of research categories (funded research projects)

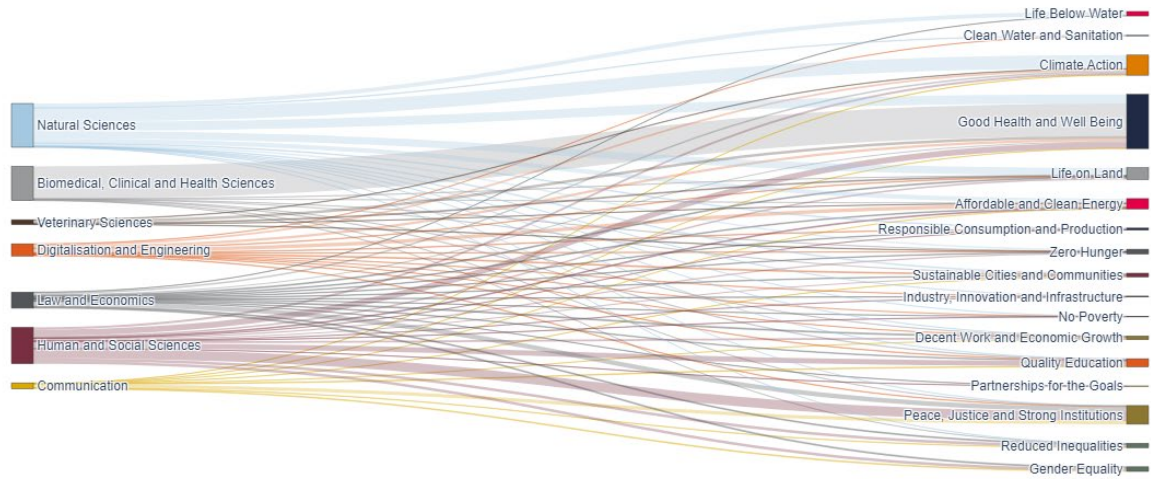


Figure 2: SDG categories by fields of research of the funded research projects at UniBE; evaluations and graphics from the Research Management Office, Vice-Rectorate Research and Innovation

The fact that research not only makes an important contribution to basic knowledge is shown by the reception of research in global policies of non-governmental organizations, but also in publications of international federations of states and organizations such as the WHO (World Health Organization) and the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization). The research results of the University of Bern serve as a scientific basis for the development of international, national and regional guidelines and also as good practices and are thus a multiplier of the transfer of research to society (see Figure 3).

SDG categories of policies in which UniBe researchers were cited

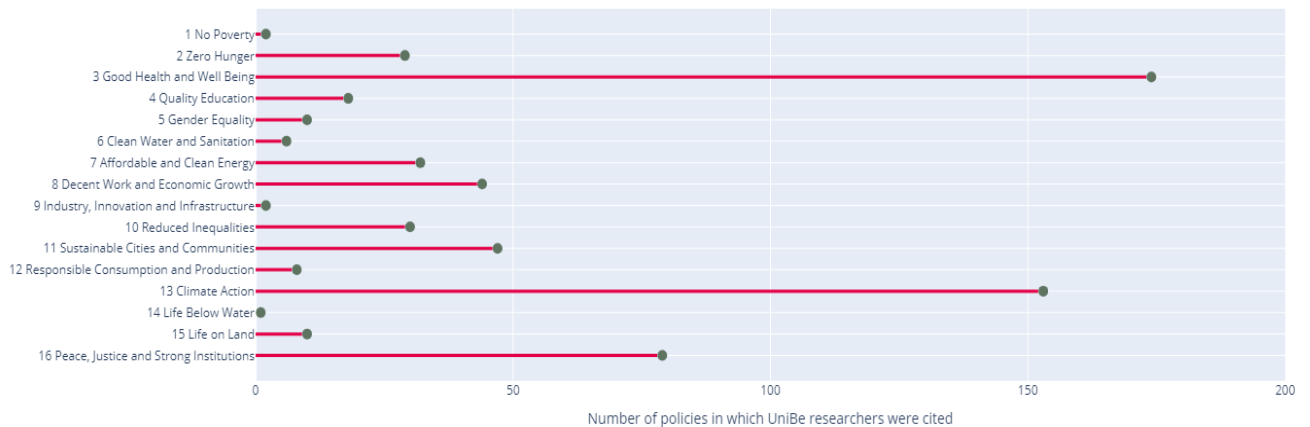



Figure 3: SDG categories of policies in which UniBe researchers were cited; evaluations and graphics from the Research Management Office, Vice-Rectorate Research and Innovation

2.3.3 Initiatives and cooperations

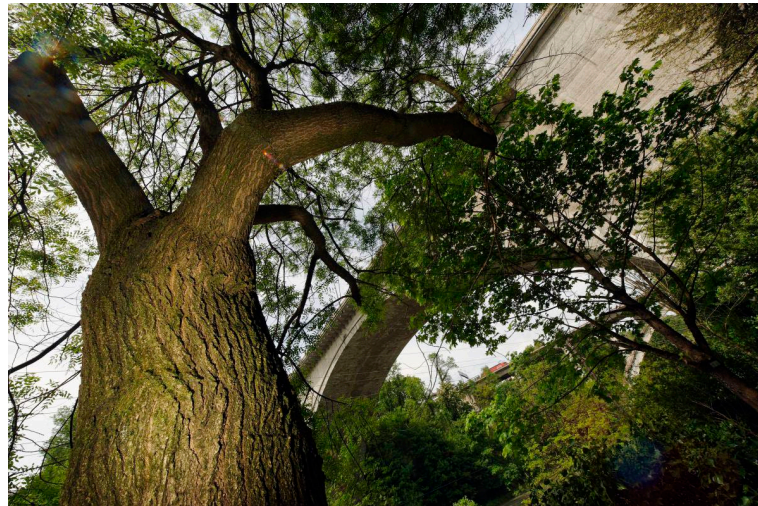
The University of Bern is involved in international initiatives and cooperations in the area of sustainability. The following activities should be highlighted in particular in the 2022/2023 reporting years:

- **[COPERNICUS Alliance](#)**: The COPERNICUS Alliance is a European network of universities that strive to integrate sustainability into teaching, research, operations and management. The University of Bern has been a member of this network since 2016. Dr. Anne Zimmermann from the CDE was President of the COPERNICUS Alliance for the 2019–2021 term of office. She is a member of the COPERNICUS Advisory Board for the 2023–2026 term of office.
- **[ENLIGHT](#)**: ENLIGHT is a European university alliance consisting of ten research-intensive full-scale universities. Together, the universities develop flexible international forms of exchange in research and teaching and strive for joint curricula and degrees in the long term. In doing so, ENLIGHT pays particular attention to societal challenges such as climate change. The University of Bern has been a member of ENLIGHT since December 2022. The Office for Sustainable Development is represented in the ENLIGHT Green Office Network.
- **[Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment](#)**: The Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment (GMBA) is a platform for international and interdisciplinary collaboration on the assessment, conservation and sustainable management of mountain biodiversity. The GMBA activities are overseen by an international scientific steering committee and supported by an international project office (IPO) located at the University of Bern and co-supervised by the University of Lausanne.

2.3.4 Sustainability-related events

- **[Sustainability Day](#)**: The University of Bern holds a Sustainability Day every two years, which has been held jointly with the Bern University of Teacher Education (PHBern) and the Bern University of Applied Sciences since 2017. How can we change our society to make a sustainable future possible? And what role do institutions of higher education have to play in this? These were the questions that the participants of the fourth joint Sustainability Day of the Universities of Bern addressed on November 3, 2023, held under the motto “Shared values and visions for a sustainable future”.
- 
- The illustration shows a hot air balloon with the letters 'u^b' on it, floating in a blue sky. Several people are gathered around the balloon, some holding balloons and others standing on a ladder. The word 'nachhaltig' is written in the top right corner of the illustration.
- **“Climate fictions” literary reading**: Every fall semester, the **[Collegium generale](#)** of the University of Bern organizes literary readings in collaboration with the publisher of the Bernese magazine *Reportagen*, Daniel Puntas. Each year, the readings focus on a selected topic, with acclaimed authors from Switzerland and abroad invited to read from their recent publications. The literary reading on the subject of **“Climate Fiction”** took place in fall 2022. The weather has always been a topic of conversation, with its phenomena becoming part of the symbolic repertoire of epics, dramas and poems. The reading was followed by a discussion of what contribution literature can make to the understanding of global warming.
 - **[Bern Botanical Garden BOGA](#)**: The Botanical Garden of the University of Bern (BOGA) has been a diverse and colorful oasis in the heart of the city of Bern since 1860. It shows the fascinating

diversity of plants and communicates their great importance for humans, but also draws attention to their endangerment. BOGA regularly hosts public events on a variety of topics.



Bern Botanical Garden

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- **Swiss Governance Forum:** The center of excellence for Public Management (KPM) organizes the Swiss Governance Forum every year. “Quo vadis energy supply?” was the topic of 2023 and addressed the questions of a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy supply. The forum provided new impetus and reflected on the most pressing issues and new progress in securing the Swiss electricity supply.

- **Children’s University:** The Children’s University of Bern aims to provide an unusual and exciting insight into the world of research in an entertaining way and enable direct contact with the lecturers of the University of Bern. The children taking part are invited to engage with a wide range of topics without pressure to perform.

In 2023, there was a lecture on “Sustainable shopping – how many things do you really need”, in which the children learned how to keep shopping as local as possible and promote a sustainable lifestyle. In a second lecture entitled “What does biological diversity mean and why is it important and good for all of us?”, the children learned why diversity is important and what can be done to ensure that it is preserved in the future.



- **Mobilier Lab for Natural Risks:** The Mobiliar Lab for Natural Risks is a joint research initiative of the Swiss Mobiliar Insurance & Pensions and the Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of Bern. The primary focus is on the processes involved in hail, flooding and storms and the resulting damage. The Mobiliar Lab works at the interface of science and practice and strives for results that are highly beneficial to the general public. The Mobiliar Lab for Natural Risks was founded in 2013 with the aim of making basic research accessible to practice. In 2023, to mark its tenth anniversary, the Mobiliar Lab launched a new information platform on the topic of hail with the competition “Switzerland is looking for the largest hailstone”. The competition ran from the beginning of June to the end of August. The aim of the competition was to encourage the public to take photos of the largest possible hailstones, upload these pictures to www.hagelforschung.ch and find out more about what to do in the event of hail on this website.



Installation of hail sensors

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- **[ESEH Conference 2023](#)**: The conference of the European Society for Environmental History (ESEH) took place at the University of Bern in August 2023, the first time it had been held in Switzerland. The theme of the conference was “Mountains and plains: past, present and future ecological and climatic interdependencies”. Christian Rohr, Director of the Department of Economic, Social and Environmental History at the Institute of History at the University of Bern and Professor of Environmental and Climate History, was the overall organizer of the ESEH in Bern.
- **[Open your Horizon – Different perspectives on sustainability](#)**: Together with Rochester-Bern, the Alumni UniBE office organized the “Open your Horizon – Different perspectives on sustainability” event, which took place in Bern on August 26, 2023. At this event, questions such as “Why is the path to a green economy so difficult?,” “What does sustainable financing look like?” and “What impact has climate change had on the mountains” were investigated.

2.3.5 Agora – dialog between science and society

Researchers at the University of Bern participate in the dialog between science and society. They are involved, for example, in Agora projects of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and in this context communicate the results of their current, sustainability-related research to a non-expert audience. The following sustainability-related Agora projects were funded in the 2022/2023 reporting years:

- ***From glacier to classroom: peer-to-peer communication to foster curiosity in science***: In order to spark interest in research and provide insights into scientific approaches, the “Girls on Ice Project” is carrying out expeditions to the Findel Glacier in the Valais Alps for young women aged 15 to 18.
- ***Game Changers for Change Agents – Sustainable Development Goals in Dialogue (ChaCha)***: The aim of the project is to make a tangible contribution to the development of transformation

knowledge in younger society in Switzerland. Using specific examples such as mobility, consumption and energy consumption, upper-secondary level pupils will fight conflicts of goals that arise in the field of conflict between planetary boundaries and their own lifestyle.

- **Science-art performances: Making co-benefits of climate mitigation measures visible and tangible:** In this project, researchers and artists from various disciplines want to break new ground in scientific communication. Artistic installations, musical and theatrical performances aim to make the effects of climate change personally tangible for people. In addition, the positive effects of climate protection measures on the quality of life are exemplified and visualized.
- **Atmosphere Watch at Schools:** The project brings the University's weather and climate change research into high school physics classes. The first objective is to increase the students' interest in atmospheric sciences and climate change and to give them an insight into the day-to-day work of young researchers. The second objective is to give young researchers at the University the opportunity to gain practical experience in science communication by explaining their research and experiences to the students.



Climate research excursion

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In addition to the Agora projects run by the Swiss National Science Foundation, scientists at the University of Bern are developing teaching materials and playful offers that serve to impart knowledge in the field of sustainability. Such as the interactive educational game "[Wake up – The Lao Coffee Game](#)" developed by the CDE and the National University of Laos in 2022. Coffee is one of the most consumed beverages in the world. In 2021 alone, around 10 billion kilograms of coffee were consumed. But what is behind all these cups of coffee that are consumed every day? How is coffee produced, processed and distributed? Who are the actors involved? And what does all this mean for sustainability? The new Lao Coffee Game of the CDE takes interested parties to a coffee-growing region in the south of Laos and lets them become actors.

2.4 Sustainability at the University Library

The University Library attaches great importance to sustainability and has therefore made it one of the four focal points in its new Strategy for 2021–2024. Furthermore, the University Library has been participating in the Swiss libraries' "Biblio 2030" sustainability initiative since 2018 and has had a corresponding working group ever since. This group is dedicated to developing activities to promote sustainable development within the University Library and to inform and raise awareness of sustainable development issues among staff and the general public.



Since 2020, it has been providing information on the University Library's commitment to sustainability in an internal monthly newsletter, and since 2021 on the University Library's website.

In the 2022/2023 reporting years, the University Library also organized various courses related to sustainability. Together with Bibliosuisse, a networking meeting with several Swiss academic libraries was held at the University Library Bern in December 2022. The aim of the meeting was to exchange views on measures implemented to date in the area of sustainable development and to establish a common platform for the most coordinated further action possible.

The "[Buch am Mittag](#)" series of events gives visitors an insight into current research topics in the humanities and social sciences in the form of short presentations. 2023 saw the presentation of topics such as "Queer at school – on the well-being of LGBTQI+ adolescents" and "Nutrition and politics – cities as drivers for more sustainability?".

2.5 Digitalization

Digitalization is changing the world. Existing patterns of thought and action are being called into question by the processes of digital change. This requires new skills in a rapidly changing reality. The University of Bern is facing up to the opportunities and challenges of digitalization and wants to play an active, critical and sustainable role in shaping the digitalization process. For this reason, the University Executive Board adopted a digitalization strategy in June 2019, which was updated, supplemented and modified in 2022 to take account of the new challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The University wants to position itself as an academic platform for society and the economy on all issues relating to digitalization. It also aims to reflect critically on the digital transformation by examining the opportunities and risks of digitalization in its research, addressing security and data protection issues, and developing proposals for implementing the digital transformation in a responsible way. The relevant research is conducted on a monodisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary basis and is incorporated into the University's teaching.

In addition to the activities in research and teaching, a series of events has been created to promote a [critical approach to digitalization](#). Since fall 2019, lectures and workshops have been held to reflect critically on a topic, with a focus on sustainability issues. The responsible working group of the Vice-Rectorate Quality and Sustainable Development approaches faculties, centers and other units of the University in turn to carry out the event.



Night of Research

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3. Teaching

3.1 Education for sustainable development – the understanding of the University of Bern

Education for sustainable development enables all actors of a society to participate in the individual and societal search, learning and design process of sustainable development. These learning processes are of great importance in relation to sustainable development. Thus, researchers and, in particular, lecturers at the University have the task of raising awareness among their students to the importance of science for society and its future.

After completing their studies, graduates of the University can play a decisive role in shaping sustainable development in responsible positions in research, teaching, administration, the private sector, civil society and politics. Therefore, university education for sustainable development should enable students, among other things, to think in a networked and interconnected manner, to grasp complex society-environment impact structures and processes, and to formulate impact hypotheses about the causes and possible consequences of such processes. The development of certain competencies (e.g., critical thinking, participatory action, self-reflection, etc.) plays a key role in the discussion about education for sustainable development.



Lecture at the vonRoll University Center

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3.2 Degree programs

The challenges posed by sustainable development for current and future generations can only be overcome by bringing together a variety of different disciplines and players. The University of Bern thus offers specific study programs to provide its students with the knowledge and methodical skills required to recognize the problems associated with sustainable development and to tackle them from an inter- and transdisciplinary perspective.



At the bachelor's and master's levels, the University of Bern offers study programs on sustainable development that are highly inter- and transdisciplinary and application-oriented, and are aimed at students of all disciplines and faculties.

- **Bachelor Minor Sustainable Development:** Theories, concepts, approaches and methods are taught and applied through interdisciplinary work in groups and on case studies. In addition to promoting professional and methodological skills, emphasis is placed on strengthening social, communication and creative skills, which are of key importance for inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration. The Bachelor Minor Sustainable Development is offered in the form of study programs with 15, 30 and 60 ECTS credits from the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE).
- **Master's Minor in Sustainable Development:** The Master's Minor in Sustainable Development provides research-oriented and applied content and methodological skills that enable students to deal with sustainable development issues within and across disciplines, thereby contributing their own disciplinary knowledge and skills in a productive manner. Students deal with global societal challenges relating to sustainable development, the status and perspectives of research in this regard, as well as with interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary theories and transformation approaches for sustainable development. Tuition and support are also provided for students to acquire skills in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and project work as well as skills in methodology, reflection and communication. The Master's Minor in Sustainable Development is offered by the CDE to the tune of 30 ECTS credits.
- **Master's in Sustainability Transformations:** A team at the CDE worked hard in 2022 and 2023 to launch the new master's degree program in the fall semester of 2024.

At the doctoral level, sustainability is a core focus of the interuniversity *International Graduate School North-South* (IGS North-South). In terms of continuing education, the University of Bern offers a *Sustainable Development course that leads to a certificate* (CAS SD).

In the area of sustainability, the degree programs of the University of Bern also include the master's degree programs of the Oeschger Centre for Climate Change Research (OCCR), the World Trade Institute (WTI) and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (ICFG), as well as their graduate schools.

Centers	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Graduate school	Continuing education
CDE	Bachelor Minor Sustainable Development	Master's Minor in Sustainable Development	International Graduate School North-South (IGS North-South)	CAS Sustainable Development
OCCR		Master in Climate Sciences	Graduate School of Climate Sciences	
WTI		Master of Advanced Studies in International Law and Economics (MILE)	Graduate School of Economic Globalisation and Integration	
ICFG		Master Minor Gender Studies	Graduate School of Gender Studies	

Summer schools: Every summer, the University of Bern offers students and researchers the opportunity to explore a specific topic in an international environment in various summer schools. The majority of summer schools are primarily aimed at doctoral students and postdocs, but summer schools are also increasingly being offered for Bachelor's and Master's students, some of which are also conducted online. The following table provides an overview of the summer schools offered in the two reporting years:

Centers	Bachelor's & master's degrees 2022	PhD & Postdoc 2022	Bachelor's & master's degrees 2023	PhD & Postdoc 2023
OCCR	International Bachelor Summer School for Climate Research "Confronting Climate Change – from Science to Policy"	Swiss Climate Summer School "Extreme Weather and Climate: from atmospheric processes to impacts on ecosystems and society"	International Bachelor Summer School for Climate Research "Confronting Climate Change – from Science to Policy"	Swiss Climate Summer School "Climate-Water-Energy-Food Nexus"
CDE	International Bachelor and Master Summer School on Sustainable Development "Co-designing solutions for transformative change"		International Bachelor and Master Summer School on Sustainable Development "Co-designing solutions for transformative change"	IGS North-South Summer School "Common pool resources in a globalized world"
OneHealth			"One Health" Summer School "Hidden players in the food chain"	

3.3 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

3.3.1 Integration of sustainable development in all curricula

The University of Bern understands sustainable development as an individual and societal search, learning and design process in which all members of society participate. A participatory process such as this requires all players to possess the relevant knowledge and skills. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is thus a key component of the educational mandate. For this reason, the University of Bern pursues the goal of integrating Sustainable Development into all curricula and has anchored this at the strategic level.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



To help lecturers integrate sustainable development into their disciplines, the University provides working materials and services. These support services were developed by the [Education for Sustainable Development](#) team (ESD team) on behalf of the Vice-Rectorate Quality and Sustainable Development on the basis of existing experience in teaching on sustainable development and are constantly being further developed and supplemented. There is a wide range of support services which extends from teaching materials through workshops and consultations to a funding program:

- **Guidelines and practice-oriented publications:** The guideline ["Integrating Sustainable Development into higher education"](#) is aimed at lecturers from all disciplines who wish to take up and

integrate the interdisciplinary topic of sustainable development into University courses. It contains brief, basic information on sustainable development and education for sustainable development.

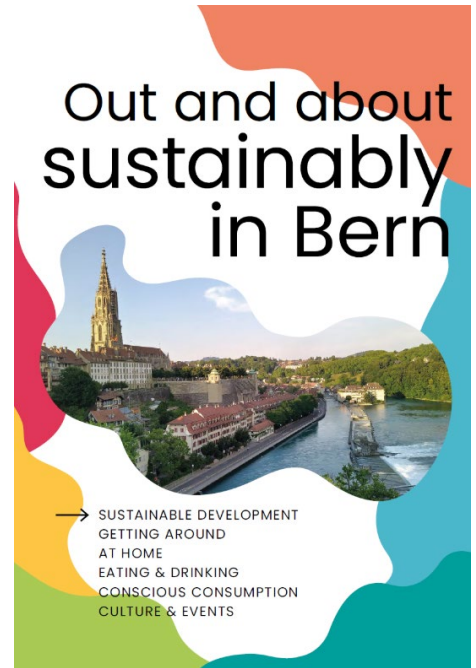
In 2022, the study [“Students between science and society: why students’ learning experiences in transformative spaces are vital to higher education institutions”](#) by Lilian Trechsel et al. was published by the ESD team. The study investigated how the boundary between science and society can be crossed in order to be able to support the transformation of higher education in the sense of sustainable development as a holistic approach.

- **Teaching materials:** The ESD material is freely available and will be updated on an ongoing basis. It contains sets of slides, learning videos, teaching examples and collections with links to web-based didactic and methodological tools.
- **Workshops and coaching:** The ESD team offers various services to lecturers at the University of Bern in order to jointly find the link of their own discipline to sustainable development.
- **Funding program:** The competitive funding program [“Promoting Sustainable Development through education” \(FNE\)](#) supports lecturers at the University of Bern in developing elective courses with a focus on sustainable development. Since the start of the funding program in 2017, several projects have already been approved, seven of them in the 2022/2023 reporting years. In 2023, funded projects were published as FNE short articles in the online magazine of the University of Bern (uniAKTUELL) to show how the topic of sustainability is integrated into the teaching of all faculties and fields of study. Reports on the following three projects were included: [“Students show solutions for sustainable building”](#), [“Let’s talk about waste!”](#) and [“Construction waste is the concrete of tomorrow”](#).
- **Online tutorial:** The ESD team at the University of Bern developed a [two-hour online tutorial](#) on sustainable development, which was published internally at the University in November 2018. The online learning offer allows students to discover what sustainability is and what it has to do with their own discipline in an understandable and exciting way. Following the completion of the pilot phase and the evaluation process, the online tutorial has been available for use by lecturers and their students since 2020. In 2022, the tutorial was included in the “Competencies for the (digital) future” program alongside other tutorials on various topics.
- **SD approaches:** The ESD team is developing SD approaches that show interdependencies in terms of sustainability from subject-specific perspectives and serve as a basis for discussion and assistance for lecturers at all faculties. In close collaboration with internal University experts, links between the specialist disciplines for sustainable development were developed and presented in a concise and clear manner. These documents are available in [German](#) and [English](#).

3.3.2 Study booklet – Out and about sustainably in Bern

In 2021, the ESD team at the University of Bern developed a sustainable city guide for students of the University of Bern. The book [*“Out and about sustainably in Bern”*](#) invites students to consider what they need for a happy and good life and contains facts, ideas and tips in the areas of “Getting around,” “At home,” “Eating & drinking,” “Conscious consumption” and “Culture & events”.

The PDF version of the booklet is available on the ESD website and is intended to make the topic accessible to all interested parties. The German booklet was translated into English in order to make the relevant information available to international students. The English version was revised in 2023 and printed again as a booklet.



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4. Operations

4.1 Spatial infrastructure

The spatial infrastructure is provided to the University of Bern by the *Office for Real Estate and Buildings (AGG)* of the Canton of Bern, which pays attention to sustainability during construction and renovation. New buildings and conversions in the Canton are certified in accordance with the *Sustainable Building Standard Switzerland SNBS*, which is based on existing instruments (such as MINERGIE® and MINERGIE-ECO® with a focus on building ecology and energy efficiency). The aim is to achieve platinum rating. This does not apply to buildings on unsuitable building sites where certification is impossible. In the event of non-certification, the “Sustainable Construction and Management” guideline of the AGG applies.

The *Building Development Office* of the University of Bern is responsible for the maintenance and expansion of spatial infrastructure. It plans buildings that are use-specific (e.g., laboratory, office, library) but, as far as possible, are not tailored to specific users (e.g., specific institutes). In this way, it is possible to respond to changes in demand without having to immediately start rebuilding. Furthermore, guidelines are applied which aim to use rooms/spaces economically.

4.2 Total energy consumption

Compared to the previous year, total energy consumption per person³ fell by 5% in the 2022 reporting year. The decrease was mainly due to the mild temperatures in fall and winter and the cost-cutting measures announced due to the energy shortage. In spite of increased consumption of gas and electricity, overall energy consumption is therefore declining. The increase in gas consumption can mainly be explained by the fact that the new laboratory building at Murtenstrasse 24–28 will be open all year round for the first time, with a gas-fired steam generation system for the autoclaves.

Despite a slight increase in the number of employees, energy consumption fell marginally in 2023 (-3% compared to the previous year) while maintaining the same floor space. The increased consumption of natural gas, which was again largely attributable to the new laboratory building on Murtenstrasse in 2023, was offset by savings in district heating.

In 2017, the University of Bern conducted a consumption analysis in 14 areas as part of the large-scale consumer model with initial potential estimates for consumption optimization. On this basis, a cantonal target agreement with a term of 10 years was concluded in 2018 with the building owner, the Office for Real Estate and Buildings (AGG) and the Office for the Environment and Energy (AUE): An annual increase in energy efficiency of 0.41% per year (or 4.1% after ten years) was specified for the University of Bern. This figure takes into account the fact that the University has energy-intensive laboratory buildings with a high proportion of process energy that cannot be influenced. The objectives of the target agreement were met between 2017 and 2023.

4.3 Energy sources

Since 2018, the University of Bern has obtained electricity from renewable sources (hydropower, biomass, solar energy). As a result of the turmoil on the electricity exchange, electricity for 2023 was procured without a defined quality. Certificates of origin for hydropower in Switzerland were subsequently purchased, meaning that 100% of electricity was also purchased from renewable sources in 2023.

³ The number of persons comprises the students and employees as FTEs.

The University of Bern mostly uses district heating to heat its buildings: In the two years under review, 86% and 85%, respectively, of the heating energy came from district heating. Although the direct use of gas and heating oil was low at 14% and 15%, respectively, in the two reporting years, it increased slightly compared to previous years. This is primarily due to the aforementioned increased gas consumption due to the commissioning of the new laboratory building at Murtenstrasse 24–28.

Suitable locations for photovoltaic systems (PV systems) are continuously reviewed by the Canton of Bern as the building owner, represented by the Office for Real Estate and Buildings (AGG) as part of building renovations or major repairs. In 2023, there were 14 photovoltaic systems with an installed capacity of 740 kWp on the roofs of the University of Bern. A further expansion of the PV systems on the University buildings is foreseeable.

4.4 Water

Between 1995 and 2012, water consumption per person was halved, even though the area occupied increased and the number of students doubled. After showing a slight increase from 2014–16, water consumption dropped again in 2017/18 to undercut the levels reached in 2012. In 2018/19, water consumption was kept at this low level. A noticeable decline in water consumption was recorded in 2020/21, which was attributable to the reduced use of buildings due to the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdowns. In the 2022 reporting year, building operations were almost normalized again from the spring onwards. As a result, water consumption also increased back to pre-coronavirus levels. In 2023, water consumption once again increased slightly compared to the previous year.

The University of Bern's commitment to the topic of water extends beyond the operational sphere. Since 2013, the University has carried the ["Blue University"](#) label, which is awarded by the Canadian NGO "Council of Canadians". As a Blue University, the University recognizes the human right to water, pays attention to sustainable water use, and works to ensure that water supply and use remain in public hands.

The University fulfills its responsibility in this regard in a variety of ways: It is involved in a number of national and international projects, underpinned by its many years of research into water and water management. Meanwhile, it conducts research into and teaching on the topic of human rights, thus helping to underscore the fundamental right to water.

It also promotes a sustainable approach to water and offers its own carafes and recyclable drinking bottles for students and employees to fill up. The refectories and cafeterias also offer treated tap water, either sparkling or still. Blue University was relaunched among students in the fall semester of 2023.



4.5 Waste

The University of Bern attaches importance to reducing the amount of non-recyclable waste and to fully exploiting the possibilities of waste recycling. Since 2010, it has had a waste disposal policy that takes sustainability into account and is based on the integrated product policy, which considers products along their entire life cycle. The principle “*Avoid – Minimize – Recycle*” applies, which is central to sustainable waste management.

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Sustainable waste management at the University of Bern includes, for example, the following: Depending on the type, waste can be handed in to the Facility Services or the special waste collection point, after which it is sent for further recycling in accordance with the regulations (e.g. electrical scrap, light sources, batteries, scrap metal, various chemicals). In addition, since 2020, all University of Bern sites have been equipped with recycling boxes (paper, PET, aluminum cans, residual waste). New buildings are also equipped accordingly. With regard to further recycling measures, it should be noted that the recycling of empty toner cartridges and used toner containers was introduced at the end of 2017 and has since been gradually extended to the properties of the University of Bern.

Since 2019, Corning tubes made of polypropylene (PP) have been collected at the Institute of Geography (GIUB) and recycled by a recycling company. Recycling, including the transport of other plastic laboratory materials, was evaluated in 2020. The evaluation has shown that only non-contaminated plastics are currently recyclable in Switzerland. Since 2021, PP pipette racks have been recycled at various institutes.

With regard to the volume of waste, the following statements can be made for the reporting period: In 2022, the amount of waste per person per year increased by 9% compared to the previous year. This can be attributed to the almost normalized University operations following the coronavirus pandemic. In 2023, the volume decreased again by 3% compared to the previous year. On the one hand, this may be a consequence of the switch to recycled tableware in the canteens and, on the other hand, could indicate that people are sorting their waste more effectively.

4.6 Food and drinks

The University of Bern attaches great importance to the sustainability of its catering facilities. It focuses in particular on transparency and choice for its guests. The ZFV cooperative (ZFV) has been committed to providing catering to students, lecturers and staff for around 15 years and won the new call for tenders for the University of Bern’s gastronomy in 2021.

In November 2022, the Sustainability at the University of Bern action plan for 2023/2024 was presented and approved by the ZFV. It considers aspects relating to climate protection, health, resource conservation as well as social and ethical issues.

The measures already implemented by ZFV in terms of environmental friendliness, regionality and seasonality are manifold.

The ZFV Food & Beverage Charter combines the principles of catering and procurement policy in a binding overview. The aim of the guidelines is to implement responsible and sustainable thinking and actions in all ZFV establishments with clear and uniform requirements. For example, the meat (beef, veal, pork, chicken) comes predominantly from Switzerland, the coffee beans are fair trade and preferably organic, the vegetables, fruit and potatoes are sourced from Switzerland whenever possible, and air freight is avoided whenever possible.

Vegetarian and vegan dishes are a permanent feature of the cafeterias and are on the menu every day. “Vegveg Day” has been in place since 2022. Once a month, only vegan and vegetarian dishes are served in the ZFV canteens.

ZFV is committed to reducing food waste and increasing awareness of the issue. To this end, it has introduced effective tools: Raising awareness and training employees, good purchasing and quantity planning and taking leftovers into account when planning menus. In 2023, the amount of food waste per main meal was determined over a period of four weeks and further measures were derived from this for 2024.

ZFV works with the Swiss company [reCIRCLE](#) in the fight against disposable tableware. In the 2023 reporting year, all disposable menu trays in the canteens were eliminated and the “bring your own cup” concept was re-introduced. As a result, 34,000 disposable coffee cups were saved between August and December 2023. In addition, the “Grab n’ Go” reusable product range was further expanded.

In September 2023, the University of Bern’s first vegan student cafeteria opened in cooperation with [Bakery Bakery](#) at Gertrud-Woker-Strasse 3 (Bühlplatz student cafeteria). This is a joint pilot project with the aim of bringing together different areas: a changing range of services, sustainability, inexpensive catering, learning oases, rooms for students with children and much more besides. The Bakery Bakery range is 100% vegan.



Outdoor area of the student cafeteria in the main building

© University of Bern

4.7 Climate protection

The University of Bern has set itself the goal of reducing greenhouse gases in all areas in which it has a direct influence and thus contributing to climate protection. This commitment is not only a necessity for the University of Bern due to continuing unchecked global warming, but also a question of credibility, as it is one of the world’s most acclaimed research institutions in climate change research. The University of Bern therefore not only wants to conduct climate research, but also to implement its own findings in its operations and during business trips, thereby making a contribution to climate protection. The principle is to reduce CO_{2eq} emissions as much as possible and to offset the unavoidable emissions with appropriate measures.

At the start, four phases were defined based on the fundamental idea that a carbon footprint first needed to be prepared as a kind of stock-taking measure to ascertain where the University stands. From that basis, the University could then determine the abatement potential, develop abatement measures and make a contribution toward climate protection that is equal in amount to the remaining emissions. These topics were worked on side by side from the very start, meaning that the phases are not proceeding sequentially, rather simultaneously. Annual carbon footprints are prepared and checked regularly for prevention and abatement potential.

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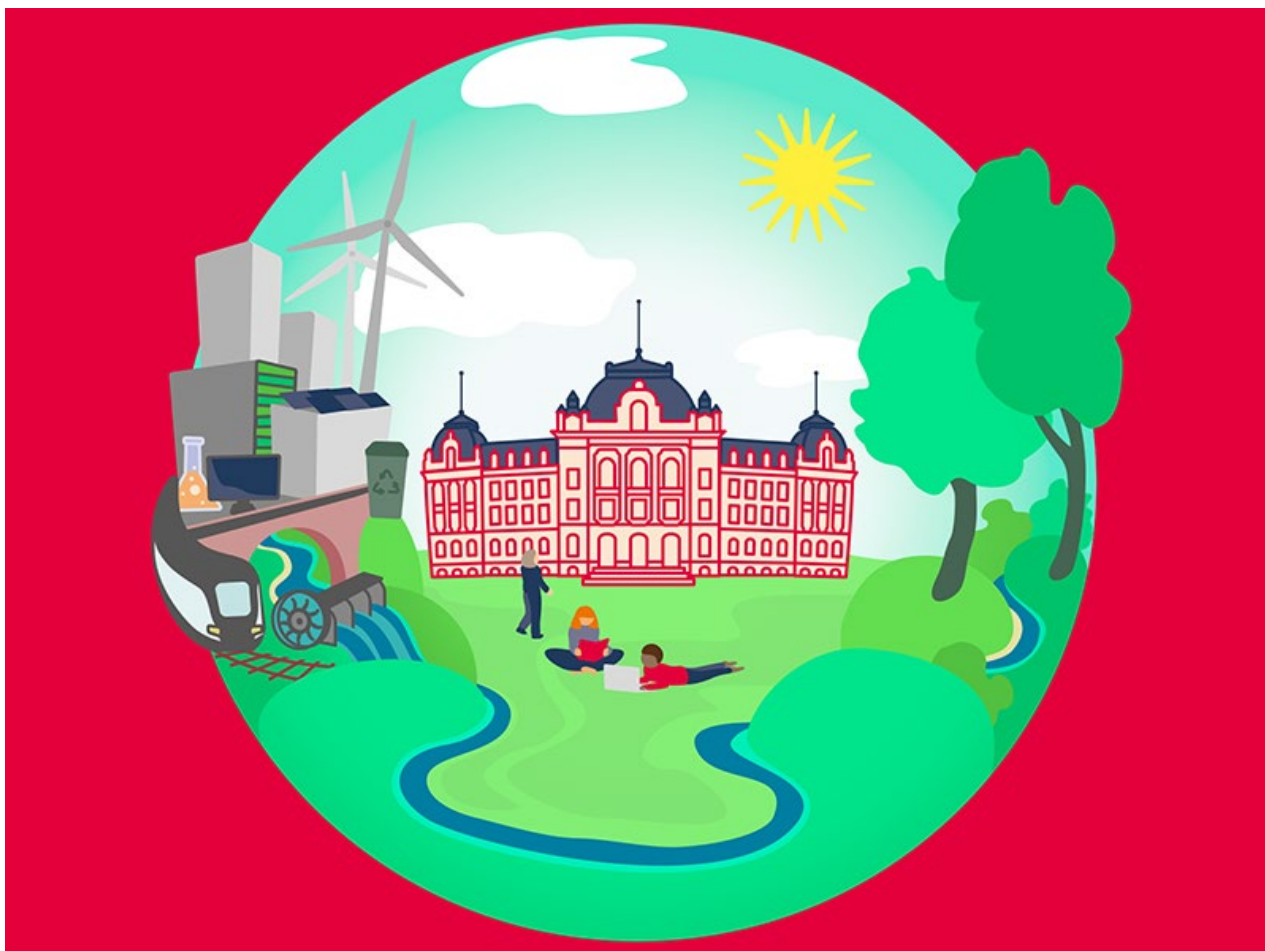


Illustration by Manuela Leuenberger

4.7.1 Carbon footprint

The University of Bern's first carbon footprint was prepared for 2019. Detailed information can be found in the respective annual [greenhouse gas reports](#).

The University of Bern produced a total of 6,291 tons of CO_{2eq} emissions in 2022. With 5,076 employees expressed in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE) and 19,279 students, this corresponds to average emissions of 0.26 t CO_{2eq} per capita.

While the 2022 carbon footprint was no longer as strongly impacted by pandemic-related restrictions, it was influenced by measures taken to curb the impending energy shortage in the fall and winter of 2022. Consumption data and thus the emissions caused have declined in the areas of heating supply to the

buildings, while in the case of natural gas, the impact of cost-saving measures was overshadowed by the increase in consumption due to a newly occupied laboratory building.

The University of Bern produced a total of 7,665 tons of CO_{2eq} emissions in 2023. With 5,141 employees (full-time equivalents, FTE) and 19,640 students, this corresponds to average annual emissions of 0.31 t CO_{2eq} per capita. In 2019, this amounted to a total of 7,861 CO_{2eq} or 0.34 t CO_{2eq} per capita. Total emissions have fallen by approx. 2.5% compared to 2019. Emissions per capita have fallen by approx. 8.8%. Emissions from air travel remain the largest single source, accounting for 60% of total emissions.

Figure 4 shows a multi-year comparison for 2019 to 2023 illustrating both the decline in the share of emissions attributable to air travel as a result of the pandemic as well as the increase in emissions related to the natural gas supply, which is attributable to more precise data collection and the addition of new buildings.

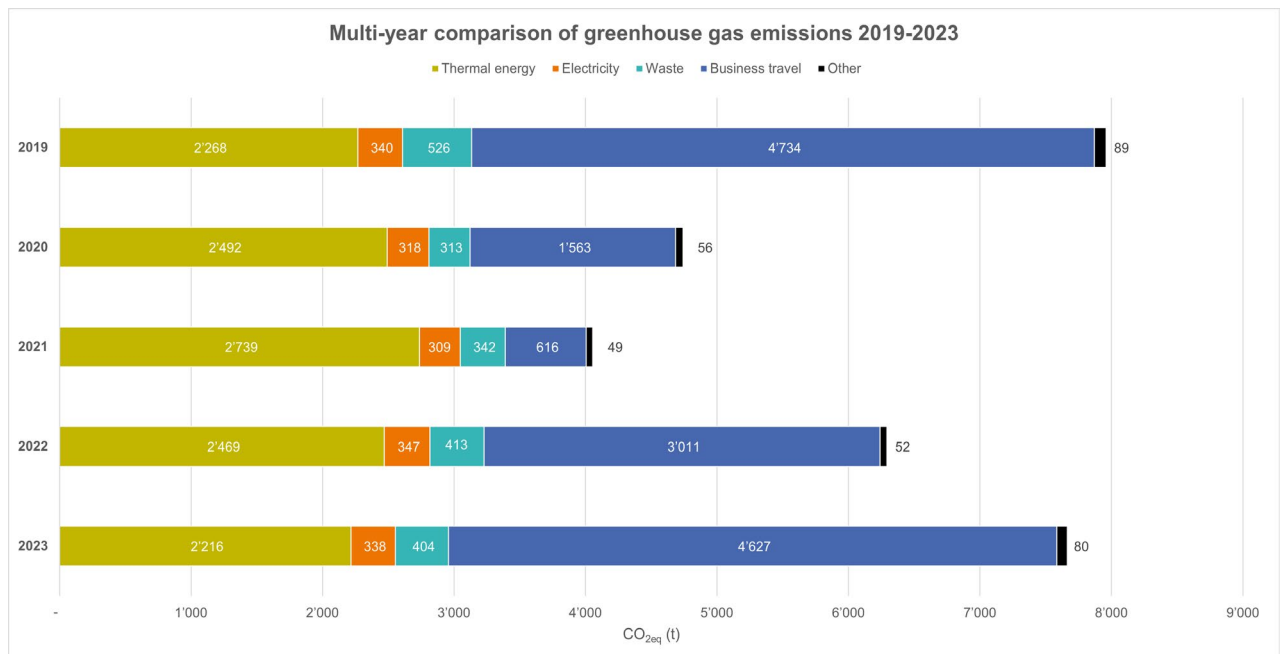


Figure 4: Greenhouse gas emissions of the University of Bern, 2019–2023. Greenhouse gas emissions are shown in CO_{2eq} by emission source. Thermal energy mainly includes vehicle fuels, heating oil, gas, district heating; business trips include air travel (approx. 99%) and train travel (from 2023); waste includes household waste and special waste. Other includes water consumption, paper, nitrous oxide, livestock farming and experimental areas for research.

It should be noted that fluctuations in emissions, especially from district heating, are partly the result of different emission factors that vary from year to year when calculating CO_{2eq} emissions. Figure 5 shows that total energy consumption in kilowatt hours (electricity, heating oil, gas and district heating) in relation to the number of students and employees has been decreasing slightly since 2019.

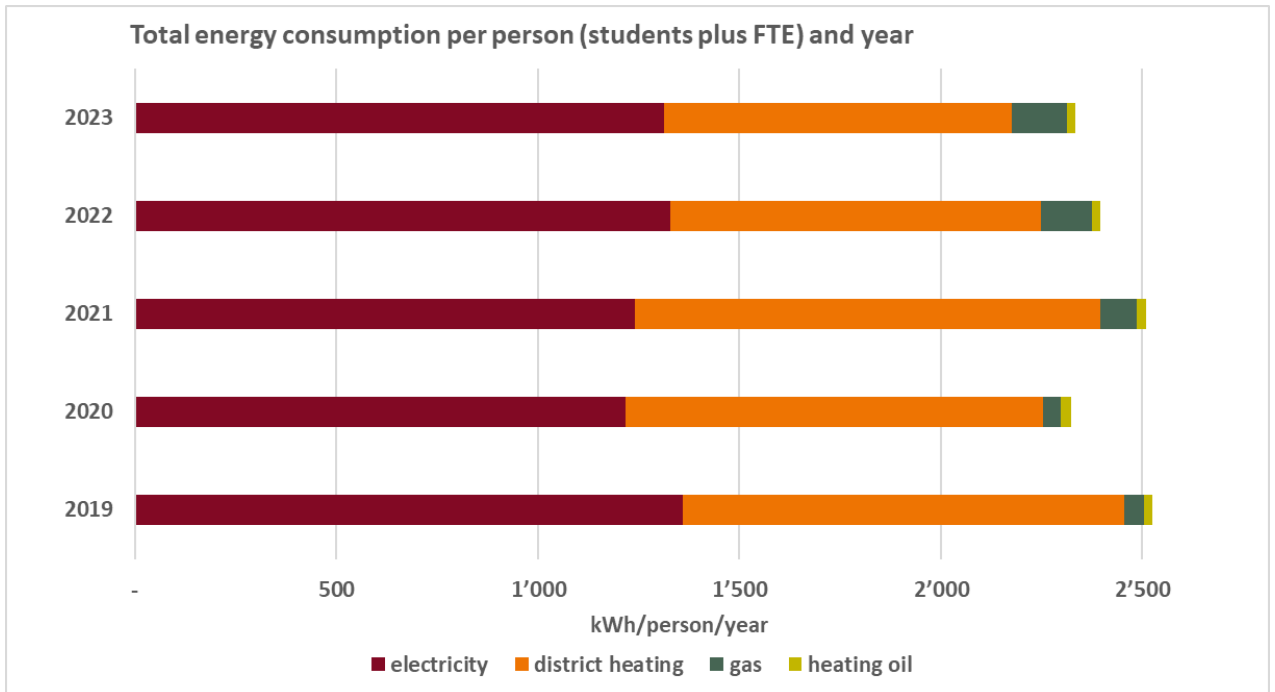


Figure 5: Multi-year comparison from 2019 to 2023 of the University’s total energy consumption in kWh/person/year (electricity, heating oil, gas, district heating). Persons are students and employees in FTE.

4.7.2 Abatement

In recent years, the University of Bern has implemented measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Initially, cross-institutional measures were taken, such as calculations and clarifications regarding the switch to more climate-friendly energy procurement, the avoidance of air travel and the promotion of digital event formats. There is a need for further action, for example in the implementation of central measures and in the design of participatory measures tailored to the needs of the faculties.

The reduction measures already implemented in the areas of mobility and energy are briefly presented below:

Mobility

Business trips (flights, rail travel) and commuting are important topics in day-to-day university life, as research takes place both on a national and international stage. Both staff and students can play their part in reducing this pollution.

Business trips:

The University of Bern has a business travel policy with guidelines for more climate-friendly business trips. This includes, among other things, the traffic light system for University business trips as well as the mandatory booking via the travel platform and SBB Business Travel.

In order to reduce CO_{2eq} emissions in the area of air travel, the University of Bern has had a [traffic light system for University business trips](#) since 2020. It defines the destinations where train travel is mandatory (green category) and the destinations where train travel has priority over air travel (yellow category). In the yellow and red categories, the use of night trains is recommended to reduce air travel. The University has set up the central service of a University [travel platform](#) so that business trips can be documented and employees can be given optimal support during their planned trip. The travel platform consists of an online booking tool and a [travel agency](#) based in Bern. Use of the travel platform has been mandatory for all University members since January 2023. The list of destinations in the traffic light system, which is regularly updated in line with timetable changes, is stored on the travel platform.

The use of [video communication](#) is one of the various ways in which travel kilometers and thus environmental pollution can be reduced. Various software solutions as well as video conference rooms are available at the University of Bern. The video conferencing infrastructure is continuously being expanded.

Commuter traffic:

Cycling is a commonly used alternative to driving or traveling by public transport. Cycling or traveling by e-bike promotes sustainable development in several ways. Physical activity improves health, releases fewer damaging emissions into the atmosphere and saves money. The vonRoll University Center has an underground car park with space for 1,000 bicycles. It is designed to give employees and students quick access to their workplaces. The bike station is free to use. The neighboring lockers are managed by the bicycle repair shop. The vonRoll bicycle repair shop specializes in repairing and selling second-hand bikes.



Bike station at the vonRoll University Center © University of Bern

Company vehicles:

The procurement of company vehicles is the responsibility of the individual organizational units. As part of the approval process, the Facility Management Office prepares a separate report and supports the procurement of energy-efficient vehicles depending on the situation. Conventional vehicles are continuously being replaced by electric vehicles.

Energy

In consultation with the Facility Management Office, the University of Bern has clarified the switch to more climate-friendly energy products and is supporting the corresponding changeover.

Electricity:

The University has been purchasing electricity from 100% renewable sources (hydropower, biomass, solar energy), produced primarily in Switzerland, since 2016.

Suitable locations for photovoltaic systems are continuously reviewed by the Office for Real Estate and Buildings (AGG) of the Canton of Bern as the building owner as part of building renovations or major repairs. Data from some of the systems already installed can be viewed via [Solar log](#).

District heating:

A gradual switch to green district heating will be examined at locations currently using district heating. Wherever possible, other locations are to be connected to the district heating grid in order to replace the gas or heating oil, for example, currently in use.

Heating oil, district cooling:

The University has little room for maneuver here. There are no central options for the changeover, but the University of Bern is working closely with the canton to find sustainable solutions. In refurbishment projects, the canton as the building owner always checks whether it is possible to switch from heating oil to heat pumps or solar energy, for example.

4.7.3 Offsetting and sensibilization

Climate protection projects are an essential building block in achieving global climate protection goals. Until such time as the University of Bern is able to sufficiently reduce its emissions, it will make a positive contribution toward climate protection in an amount that is equal to its unavoidable emissions.

A mix of measures is planned which, in addition to reduction measures, includes the purchase of carbon offset certificates as well as other alternative options (including projects connected to the [Engaged UniBE](#) initiative, idea contests, etc.).

In the long term, C-sink projects and/or negative emission technologies will play a growing role since the only way to permanently cancel out any unavoidable emissions is by sequestering CO_{2eq} from the atmosphere.

Suitable measures are used to offset unavoidable emissions from air travel in accordance with the cantonal Personnel Regulations. This is done in compliance with the basic, internationally recognized criteria for offset projects. The University of Bern takes the questioning of testing and evaluation methods very seriously and adjusts the portfolio of eligible projects accordingly. A selection committee determines the criteria and selects the projects.

The emissions from air travel in 2022 amounting to 3,011 tonnes of CO_{2eq} were offset by [three projects](#). In addition to the basic, internationally recognized offsetting project criteria, the following aspects were taken into account when selecting projects at the end of 2023:

- Technology, project year and quality of information regarding the basic international criteria for offsetting.
- Preference was given to Swiss projects and projects in regions where the University of Bern conducts research.
- Where possible, preference is given to projects that address other sustainability goals in addition to CO_{2eq} reduction.

A public tender will be issued in early 2025 for the compensation of emissions from air travel in 2023. The projects are then chosen by a selection committee.



Botanical Garden University of Bern

© University of Bern

4.7.4 Collaborations with Swiss higher education institutions

The University of Bern is represented in various networks on sustainability topics throughout Switzerland. Among other things, the networks serve to network with Swiss universities and exchange best practices.

- **swissuniversities sustainability network:** The task of the swissuniversities sustainability network is to network experts from the universities, advise the committees of swissuniversities and exchange best practices. The network represents all higher education institutions (universities, universities of applied sciences, universities of teacher education) and began its work in September 2020. The University of Bern has been represented in the network since it was founded. The Head of the Office for Sustainable Development is a member of the Executive Board.
- **Swiss Network for Sustainable University Business Travel:** Founded in 2019, this network consists of sustainability and mobility officers from almost all Swiss universities and colleges and aims to find joint solutions through intensive discussions and exchange to reduce the environmental impact of air travel. The members of the network share knowledge, best practices and experience from projects related to business trips so that the participating institutions can learn and advance their own projects.
- **Network for sustainable procurement:** The Office for Sustainable Development has been represented in the network for sustainable procurement since 2023. The aim of this working group is to explore ways in which sustainability can be integrated into the procurement practices for goods and services (centralized and decentralized). The group discusses best practices, resources and tools to support the transition from processes to more sustainable procurement.
- **Green Lab network:** The Office for Sustainable Development has been represented in the Green Lab network since 2023. The task of the network is to exchange knowledge, best practices, experiences and specific measures between Swiss educational institutions in order to improve the sustainability of wet laboratories.

4.8 Biodiversity

The gardeners at the University of Bern tend to and renovate the outdoor areas of the University properties. For example, 130 properties covering an area of around 25 hectares are farmed in a natural way. Since 2018, they have been following and consistently applying a concept that takes into account near-natural care and sustainability (particularly biodiversity). The employees of the nursery are trained accordingly.

Chemical plant protection products and fertilizers are avoided, and neophytes are mechanically controlled using a rapid and regular procedure. The University's gardeners take into account, promote and incorporate native fauna and flora. Wild hedgerows, for example, are tended and supplemented with native plants to increase diversity. Native plants are mainly used whenever new plants are required. In addition, new high-trunk fruit trees are planted and old fruit trees are upgraded by professional pruning. The lawns are not fertilized and irrigated, resulting in species-rich areas. Whenever possible, flower lawns and flower meadows are created.

Small structures, such as piles of branches, piles of rocks and leaves, borders, and ponds, are welcomed and incorporated. Work is being carried out to ensure good links between the individual elements that serve as important food and shelter bases for small animals.

Since 2019, the nursery has been providing staff and students, as well as residents and passers-by, with information about the newly created habitats with appropriate boards and providing tips for gardens. When purchasing new small devices and machines, electric drives are selected wherever possible.

The measures derived from the care concept continued to be applied and implemented consistently in the two reporting years. For example, new sites for nationally protected orchids and other flower-rich lawns have been created, new high-trunk fruit trees have been planted and wild flowers have been sown. Due to climate change, mowing starts earlier and ends later. The amount of watering has increased considerably, especially in midsummer, which has led to considerable additional work.

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Garden UniS

© University of Bern

5. Professional and social context

5.1 Promoting equal opportunities

The University of Bern is committed to equal opportunities. The aim of the gender equality policy of the University of Bern is for all faculties, departments, institutes as well as administration to perceive gender equality issues and observe them in practice. The Commission and the [Office for Equal Opportunities](#) (until 2022 the Office for Gender Equality), both of which have existed since 1990, advise and support those responsible in this process.

Action plans: The University of Bern has had an action plan for gender equality since 2013 and the “Action Plan for Equal Opportunities 2021–2024” since 2021. As a result, the University of Bern is now institutionally addressing the issue of diversity under the term “equal opportunities” in addition to its previous efforts to promote gender equality.

The action plan contains targets and measures relating to the diversity categories of gender, physical and psychological impairment, age, ethnic origin (language, nationality, skin color, migration experience, religion), social origin and status, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity. As a result of this expanded mandate, the “Office for Gender Equality” was renamed the “Office for Equal Opportunities” in 2022.

However, the promotion of equal opportunities is anchored in action plans not only at University level, but also at faculty level: In 2020, all eight faculties and five centers of the University of Bern conducted an assessment and adopted new equal opportunities plans for the years 2021–24. In 2022, the faculties and centers prepared an interim report on the plans. The next assessment and development of new plans will take place in 2024.

Measures to promote equal opportunities: The measures to promote equal opportunities at the University of Bern cover a broad spectrum. They include not only quality assurance in employment procedures and the promotion of female early career researchers, but also measures on the reconcilability of studies, profession and care⁴, as well as on the combating of discrimination and stereotypes. Various new measures were launched in these areas in the two years under review and the following highlights on existing measures were recorded:

- **Quality assurance in recruitment procedures:** In 2021, the guideline “*Hiring Process at the University of Bern with Special Consideration of Equal Opportunities*” was adopted by the University Executive Board. This systematically leads to the appointment of professorships through recruitment procedures and provides many practical tips. There is also a video entitled “[Professor Wanted](#)”, which summarizes tips for a specific recruitment procedure. This is available in German and French. In the 2023 reporting year, tools were also developed to improve the implementation of the DORA Declaration, which the University of Bern signed in 2016. The DORA Declaration aims to improve the way scientific research is evaluated. This is particularly relevant for work on recruitment committees.
- **Promotion of female early career researchers:** Since 2017, the Office for Equal Opportunities has been running the “[COMET – Coaching, Mentoring and Training Women Postdocs](#)” career program, which is aimed specifically at women postdocs and habilitation candidates from all faculties and supplements the existing faculty and student mentoring programs at the University of Bern. An

⁴ Measures on the reconcilability of studies, profession and care can be found in section 5.5. of this report.

individually tailored program helps strengthen skills, know-how and motivation for an academic career. 20 places will be awarded competitively per round.

- **Choice of and admission to studies:** Choosing a field of study greatly depends on gender. The Office for Equal Opportunities is committed to breaking down stereotypes and thus weakening horizontal segregation. 2018 saw the launch of the cooperation project sponsored by swissuniversities “*chance_be: Equal opportunities in career and study choices at Bern universities*”. At the end of the four-year national cooperation project, it was decided in 2021 that the “*practice-theory dialog*” should be continued by the three universities (University of Bern, Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH and Bern University of Teacher Education PHBern) in cooperation with the canton and expanded to include other equal opportunities topics. The practice-theory-dialog meetings are open to the public and take place two to three times a year.

In addition, in 2022, there was an “obstacle course” as part of *National Future Day* on the topic of “*Traveling into the future: An obstacle course through the city of Bern to help you choose a career and study program*”. Gender segregation at work was discussed in various places in public spaces. Since 2013, a Future Day has been held at the University of Bern in close cooperation with the management of National Future Day. The “obstacle course” was developed in collaboration with the equality offices of the City of Bern and the Canton of Bern.

- **Fighting discrimination:** The University of Bern does not tolerate any kind of discrimination. It strives to promote cultural change and focus on the protection of University members.

Sexual harassment: In 2022, the internal procedures for sexual harassment at the University were revised to make the process more transparent. The processes are now also available as graphics. In the reporting years, the Sexual Harassment at Universities Awareness Day was held on March 23. Through various practical workshops, discussion rounds and reading corners, the University of Bern offered students, lecturers and staff the opportunity to engage with the topic of sexual harassment and deepen their own knowledge.

Protection of personal integrity: At the end of 2023, the University Executive Board approved the policy paper “Protection of personal integrity”. This describes the University of Bern’s commitment to protecting personal integrity, in particular in connection with discrimination, and the legal options and points of contact that are available. Among other things, it also serves to increase the low threshold for messages.

LGBTIQ+: The University of Bern promotes an open and respectful working and study atmosphere – also with regard to the sexual and romantic orientation or gender identity of University members. It takes measures to promote equality for LGBTIQ+ people. LGBTIQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intergender and queer or questioning. The + indicates that the list is not complete and that there are many other sexual and romantic orientations and gender identities. For LGBTIQ+ students and employees at the University of Bern, there is a point of contact at the Office for Equal Opportunities, which offers support in challenging situations in day-to-day University life or can accompany coming-outs at the University.

In May of each of the two reporting years, the University of Bern celebrated the *International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)* for the first and second time. Various activities, courses and campaigns on the topic of LGBTIQ+ were held in each case.

Hate speech: The University of Bern condemns hate speech of any kind and helps its researchers take action against it. “Hate speech” is an overarching term for a manner of expressing opinions that denigrate, insult or threaten individuals or groups of people or that incite violence against these individuals or groups. Hate speech can come in different forms and reach people in different ways (social media, e-mail, phone calls, online comments, etc.). Digitalization, in particular, has caused

the phenomenon of hate speech to become a more widespread problem and lowered peoples' inhibitions for inciting hostility. The University of Bern offers points of contact for individuals affected by abusive language and discrimination. Various courses and events on this topic were held in the two years under review and new offers were created for employees of the University of Bern, such as media training and emergency aid.

Racism: The University strives for a respectful, inclusive and non-discriminatory study and working environment and does not tolerate racism. Discrimination on the basis of origin is prohibited (Art. 8 para. 2 of the Swiss Federal Constitution) and the University combats racism on a structural, institutional and individual level. The University is taking appropriate measures on the basis of an action plan and is thus committed to a more discrimination-free culture.

Anyone who feels they have been the victim of racist discrimination in the context of the University of Bern is entitled to support and advice. The University of Bern is also interested in reporting racist incidents in order to better understand the phenomenon and take targeted measures. Affected and observing members of the University have the option of reporting incidents confidentially using a report form or directly by e-mail to the Office for Equal Opportunities.

2023 saw the launch of the campaign *"We need to talk" ... about racism!* Racism is a problem affecting society as a whole that must be tackled as such. Unfortunately, people are still not talking enough about it – this is to be changed at the University of Bern.

- ***Better Science – for a rethink in the academic world:*** In 2020, the "Better Science" initiative was launched at the University of Bern. It calls for a rethink in academia away from the paradigm of speed and towards more sustainability, diversity and quality. The website "[Better Science](#)" introduces the topic and invites people to sign the ten calls to action that enable a healthier academic culture in Switzerland and beyond at an individual level.
- ***"Prix Lux" equal opportunities prize:*** The University of Bern has been awarding the "[Prix Lux equal opportunities prize](#)" since 2017 to individuals or entities that actively promote equality in the field of gender and diversity. In 2022, the "Prix Lux" was awarded to the National Center of Competence in Research "[NCCR RNA & Disease](#)", which pursues the central concern of closing the leaky pipeline in natural sciences. This includes a support program that extends employment beyond a flexibility grant or allows for longer parental leave for fathers and same-sex couples. In 2023, the prize was awarded to the collective of medical students "[CLASH Bern](#)", which speaks out against sexism and sexual harassment in everyday hospital and University life.

Gender share: The University of Bern pursues the goal of achieving an appropriate proportion of both genders at all levels. At the professorship level, the University defined the following targets in its 2021–24 action plan: By 2024, the aim is to have 33% of full and associate professorships held by women, and 40% of assistant professorships **with and without tenure track**.

In 2022 and 2023, the proportion of women among assistant professorships with and without tenure track was well above the target value of 40% at 58.3% and 58%, respectively. The proportion of women among full and associate professorships continued to rise and stood at 26.5% in 2023.

In summary, it should be noted that the target of having at least 40% women among assistant professorships with and without tenure track has been met for years. However, despite rising figures, the target for the proportion of women of 33% in associate and full professorships has not yet been met.

5.2 Diversity

The University of Bern is committed to combating discrimination and promoting equality and equal opportunities at the University. This includes eliminating the disadvantages faced by people with disabilities and chronic diseases and removing barriers in studying and working at the University of Bern. The aim is to provide equal access and participation for students and staff with disabilities and chronic illnesses. In order to ensure that the University facilities and services can be used by as many groups of people as possible, the University takes the following measures:

Adjustment of the study situation: The Office for Equal Opportunities offers support to both prospective and current students. It deals with the University-related concerns of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. The task of the Office is to find solutions jointly and individually with those affected in order to ensure that study and work at the University of Bern is as barrier-free as possible. The Office for Equal Opportunities also offers assistance in the preparation of the application for disadvantage compensation. An initial workshop was held with all faculties in 2022, focusing on processes and tools relating to disadvantage compensation. This exchange forms the basis for the development of further measures.

Lecture halls: In construction projects, attention is paid to obstacle-free buildings and lecture halls. Information on obstacle-free accessibility (such as wheelchair accessibility and induction systems) can be found in the study profile sheet (KSL) under the details of the lecture halls in the “Building for All” section.

Web accessibility: The University of Bern website was designed and implemented in accordance with the latest accessibility guidelines and can be read by screen readers. In the 2022 reporting year, the University Executive Board approved the request to revise the unibe.ch portal, among other things, to better address target groups. The revision was carried out and relaunched in the following year. An improvement in the target group accessibility was observed.

5.3 Compass UniBE – University Preparation for Refugee Students

For people wanting to start or continue their studies as refugees, Swiss higher education is a path full of challenges. Existing structural and institutional hurdles, such as the admission requirements of higher education institutions, in particular the high requirements for language skills and previous education, the lack of recognition of competences, familiarization with a new study system, the question of financing tertiary-level education and the lack of specific integration measures, contribute to the fact that the admission numbers of qualified refugees remain low.

With the [“Compass UniBE – University Preparation for Refugee Students”](#) project, the University of Bern wants to contribute to removing these hurdles. Compass UniBE enables qualified refugees interested in studying to acquire study-relevant skills and competences and to qualify for admission to a regular course of study. In doing so, the University of Bern contributes to equal opportunities for access to tertiary education for qualified refugees and promotes diversity in the student body as well as in research and teaching.

The Compass UniBE program comprises a wide range of courses and individual advice. Both courses held exclusively for Compass UniBE and selected courses from the regular programs of study at the University of Bern can be attended. In addition to compulsory courses and elective courses, there are optional courses and workshops. Depending on interests, previous education and learning needs, the timetable is compiled individually and can therefore correspond to a full-time or part-time program.

Compass UniBE has been offered by the Vice-Rectorate Quality and Sustainable Development on behalf of the University Executive Board since the fall semester 2023. The project team also advises refugees

interested in studying on questions relating to starting or continuing their studies at the University of Bern. The Compass UniBE project will initially be carried out over two pilot years (2023–2025).

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Compass UniBE

5.4 Promotion of early career researchers

The University of Bern offers a wide range of research fields and achieves international excellence in several of them. The University depends on motivated, inquisitive and critical early career researchers so that findings of great scientific and social relevance can continue to be obtained in the future. For this reason, it places great emphasis on the sustainable promotion of early career researchers, enabling them to develop their full potential. The diverse support measures include a wide range of contact points, courses on offer and funding instruments.

The advancement of early career researchers is also reflected in the University of Bern's 2030 Strategy. The advancement of early career researchers is one of the six sub-strategies that serve as the mission for the University as a whole. The University is optimizing its efforts to promote early career researchers and making it easier to plan academic career paths. The aim of these efforts is to attract aspiring academics and offer them development opportunities that will help give them a competitive edge internationally. The University is also improving employment conditions for these young researchers and ensuring that they are more involved in decision-making processes as well as bolstering their scientific independence. Early career researchers are supported from the moment they begin their research and teaching. At the doctoral level, the University is expanding its structured training program promoting disciplinary, interdisciplinary, methodological and transversal skills.

Completing a doctorate at the University of Bern: As a full-scale university with eight faculties, the University of Bern offers early career researchers attractive structures for a promising doctorate. Early career researchers can complete their doctorate either in one of the [seven graduate schools](#) or in one of around 30 doctoral programs or as part of an individual doctorate. Graduate schools and doctoral programs are arranged on an interdisciplinary and/or interuniversity basis in many cases. In addition to research-related training and intensive support, these also offer excellent opportunities for networking within the academic community.



The University Executive Board has allocated University funds to support doctoral programs for the period from 2021 to 2024. The “*University of Bern Doctoral Programs 2021–2024*” funding program is intended to further strengthen the quality and attractiveness of the doctoral degree program, as well as intensify the supervision of doctoral students and thus improve the career prospects of early career researchers both within and outside the university.

The goal of doctoral education at the University of Bern is not only the academic qualification, i.e. the dissertation, but also the acquisition of interdisciplinary competencies in order to prepare doctoral students for a challenging position inside and outside the University. Therefore, various offices and institutions at the University of Bern offer events for career planning and the acquisition of key skills, such as the free course program “Transferable Skills” for (post)doctoral students.

Funding instruments: The University of Bern supports researchers at doctorate and post-doctorate level with specific funds:

- The [fund for the promotion of young researchers](#) supports networking activities of young researchers from the doctoral level onwards.
- With the “[UniBE Initiator Grants](#)”, early career researchers at the University of Bern are supported after their doctorate in the preparation of applications for external funding. These applications can be intended for individual promotion (personal promotion) as well as for the promotion of individual projects (project promotion).
- Since 2020, postdocs with care responsibilities have been supported with the “[120% Care Grant](#)” from the University of Bern. The funding instrument enables early career researchers with care responsibilities who have a level of employment of between 80% and 100% to reduce their level of employment to at least 60% for a maximum of 12 months and to hire a support person with an overlapping workload. Since 2021, in addition to postdoctoral researchers, young lecturers in a qualification phase, assistant lecturers and assistant professors with care responsibilities have also been eligible to apply.
- Periods of research at universities and research institutions abroad are an important part of successful academic activity. With the “[UniBE Doc.Mobility](#)” funding instrument introduced in 2021, the University of Bern supports doctoral students during their research stays abroad.
- With the [UniBE Short Travel Grants for \(Post\)Docs](#) funding program, the University of Bern supports short-term research stays by doctoral students and postdocs for the further development of their own research projects. Travel and accommodation costs for research stays (field research stays, research stays at universities or other research institutions, academic work in libraries, scientific collections, archives, laboratories) abroad lasting at least two and a maximum of eight weeks are financed.

Points of contact: Early career researchers will find advice and support at various points of contact at the University of Bern:

- The [Academic Careers Office](#) (formerly the coordination office for the promotion of early career researchers) serves as the central point of contact for doctoral students and postdocs. With its services and offers, the Academic Careers Office is aimed at young researchers in all academic fields and at all qualification levels (at doctorate/PhD, postdoctorate, lectureship and assistant professorship level), faculties and all specialist units dealing with issues relating to the promotion of early career researchers.
- Founded in 2016, the [Grants Office](#) is the central point of contact for all researchers at the University of Bern and ensures the necessary support from initial advice to final completion of the project. Advice and support are provided for national and international funding vehicles of public funding agencies.
- The [Intermediate Staff Association of the University of Bern MVUB](#) represents intermediate members of the University in their academic and professional interests with respect to the University as well as boards and authorities outside the University. It sees itself as a point of contact and service center for intermediate staff. The MVUB is also the point of contact for a wide range of concerns, particularly with regard to employment relationships at the University of Bern. Furthermore, regular courses such as the MVUB lunch talks and the doc and postdoc meetings are organized by the intermediate staff association.
- The [Career Service](#) supports students and doctoral students at the University of Bern in their transition from studies to professional life. The numerous offers include seminars, workshops and training courses, as well as the “Night to launch your career” event (formerly: “Career Entry Forum”), which has been held annually since 2019.

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Night to launch your career

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5.5 Working conditions

5.5.1 Balancing career and family

The University of Bern is aware that the professional and academic paths of its students and staff are influenced by family, private and job-related circumstances. They are involved not only in their professional field of activity but also, for example, in caring for children, in their partnerships, in caring for relatives and in voluntary work. The University of Bern wants to take the personal circumstances of its employees and students into account in the working and study conditions and therefore takes correspondingly wide-ranging measures, which are constantly being expanded and further developed by the *Office for Equal Opportunities*.

Information on the topic of the [“Work-life-balance-friendly University of Bern”](#) has been compiled on one website. The services offered range from counseling and courses to support services and infrastructural measures.

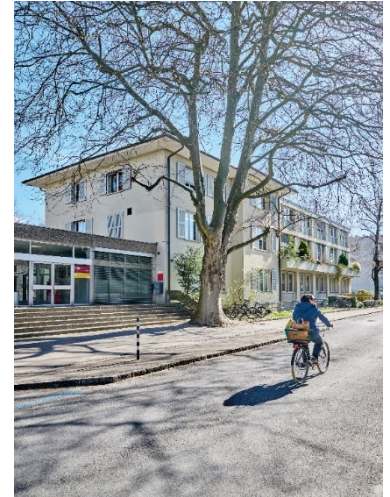
- [KIHOB, Childcare in higher education institutions in Bern](#), promotes and ensures additional family care and support for children of members of the University of Bern and the Bern University of Teacher Education and other people from areas associated with the universities.
- A [child- and family-friendly infrastructure](#) is specifically provided and expanded by the University of Bern. The corresponding infrastructure includes parent/child rooms, changing tables, medical and breastfeeding rooms, children’s highchairs in student cafeterias and dining halls, and play boxes. Since 2016, a roadmap has provided an overview of all family-friendly locations at the University of Bern. The range of family-friendly locations and the roadmap are constantly being expanded. For example, new parent-child rooms were opened at three other University of Bern locations in the 2022/2023 reporting years. An evaluation carried out in the 2022 reporting year showed that the parent-child rooms on offer are used actively and in a variety of ways.
- The University of Bern strives to give its employees the opportunity to work in contemporary work models. That is why it welcomes and encourages [job-sharing](#). This flexible working time model helps to strike a balance between work and other areas of life. Since the beginning of 2019, the University of Bern has had a relief pool for professors with care responsibilities and for job-sharing tandems.
- As part of the [“Dual Career”](#) program, the University of Bern has been supporting partners of newly arrived foreign academics (from postdoc level) in their new career start in Switzerland since 2016. In 2018, the University signed the “Letter of Intent” for the *Swiss Academic Dual Career Network (S-ADCN)*. The network supports cooperation and networking between the participating institutions with the aim of creating more attractive framework conditions for dual-career partnerships in the Swiss higher education and research landscape.
- The University of Bern has been a member of the association “Familie in der Hochschule” (Family at the University) since 2016. It was the first Swiss university to sign the international charter *“Familie in der Hochschule”* (Family at the University) and thus became a member of the Best Practice Club – a network of 150 universities.

5.5.2 Health and safety

Occupational safety, health protection and environmental safety: The University of Bern attaches great importance to occupational safety, health protection and environmental safety. A corresponding risk management system is established at the University and is managed by the [Safety Office](#) (formerly Risk Management Office). The Office advises and supports the University Executive Board as well as the faculties, institutes and administrative departments with regard to risk management, occupational safety, health

protection, environmental safety and crisis management. The Office also offers the following courses and projects:

- It offers employees annual courses in occupational safety, health protection and environmental safety. In addition to the first aid and fire protection courses, courses on how to deal with aggression and threats have also been held since December 2023.
- The Safety Office has produced five “explanatory videos” in collaboration with the Support Center for ICT-aided teaching and research at the University of Bern (iLUB). The videos can be used for initial instruction on occupational safety, health protection, and environmental safety (OHE) in the institutes and are particularly suitable as a supplement to visualizing OHE instruction, especially for line managers and authorized persons.
- Since 2012, the Safety Office at the University of Bern has coordinated the national [“bike to work”](#) campaign run by Pro Velo Switzerland. The University pays the “bike to work” participation fee. After the University of Bern did not take part in the campaign in 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic, it was held again in 2022. A total of 35,963 km were covered by bicycle as part of the campaign. This corresponds to CO₂ savings of 5,179 kg. Since 2023, the topic of “bike to work” has been part of the HR department (occupational health management). However, due to a lack of resources, the University of Bern decided not to hold a “bike to work” event in 2023. The campaign was carried out again in 2024.



“Healthy University of Bern” initiative: The Faculty of Human Sciences at the University of Bern developed an occupational health management system for the employees of the University on behalf of the University Executive Board. The aim of the *“Healthy University of Bern”* initiative is to establish sustainable health promotion and prevention and to create a working environment and an organizational culture in which health and well-being are promoted and employees are enabled to reach and develop their full potential. In the 2022 reporting year, a second phase of the initiative focused on measures for employees in the area of mental health. Further phases are also being considered. These are to adapt the implementation and expand it to other health areas and later integrate the students to support “healthy learning and healthy living”. In the same year, health issues were also included in employee surveys. It emerged that, above all, the mental health of employees and stress management needed to be improved. These two components are to become part of the newly announced action plan, for which a new position was created at the end of 2023.

University Sports: With its varied sports and exercise program, [University Sports](#) makes an important contribution to promoting the health and well-being of students and employees. The offer includes a wide range of supervised training, courses, competitions and events. In addition, University Sports offers advice and provides infrastructure for independent training. Since 2015, University Sports has had an official mission statement that specifies guiding principles for sustainability.

The University of Bern supports proven top athletes with flexible curricula so that they can combine their studies and sport in the best possible way. Furthermore, the subject of combining top-class sport with studies has been added to the University’s website as an additional advisory service, and contact persons in the individual faculties have been named. In the 2023 reporting year, the newly revised version “Recommendation for Top-Class Sport and Studies” was approved by the University Executive Board. In addition to the conditions for “Sport Status” and the procedure for dealing with inquiries, it also lists a number

of flexibility measures. In December 2023, a “GET2GETHER event” was held at the University of Bern with over 40 top athletes.

In consultation with the Office for Equal Opportunities, it was decided in 2021 that University Sports would establish a systematic monitoring system to anchor equal opportunities and gender equality. In 2021/2022, the result showed an almost even gender distribution among the 423 trainers (49% women, 51% men). In addition, a contact point for equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion has been created on the University Sports website. Since 2023, the Center for Sports and Sport Science has been able to use an additional locker room on request for people who do not feel they belong in either the men’s or women’s locker room.

In connection with environmental sustainability, University Sports founded an interdisciplinary working group in the 2021/22 academic year and with it defined possible fields of action (food, textiles, mobility, waste, paper use). Individual decisions, such as whether to travel to external services of Unisport by public transport (instead of using the University Sports Bus), will be implemented in several courses and competitions. Thanks to digital solutions, paper consumption has been reduced. University Sports has had two bicycles for employees and courier services since 2022, and since 2023, several employees have voluntarily decided not to have their own waste bin in their offices and to dispose of their waste in a central sorting device to reduce plastic. Paper consumption was further reduced.



University Sports

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5.5.3 Continuing education

As a strong and growing institution of continuing education, the University of Bern supports lifelong learning and encourages its employees accordingly. The Human Resources Office publishes a dedicated list of providers of personnel development measures and additional information on the topic on a website.

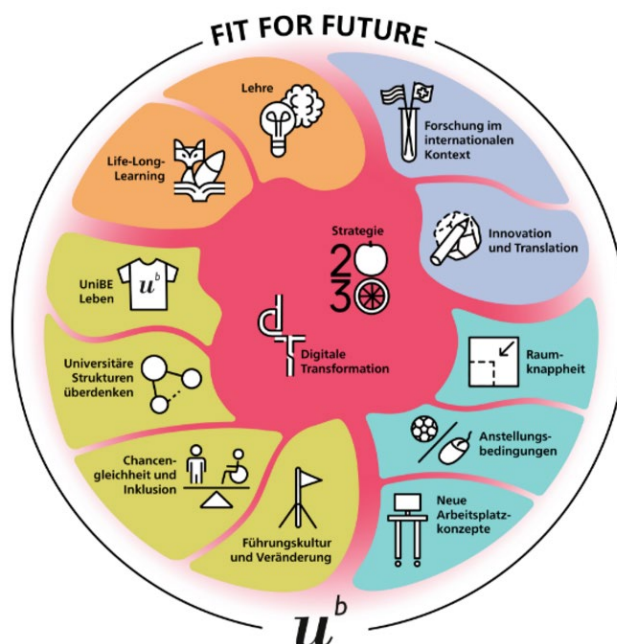
- **University course program:** The University of Bern’s offerings include numerous internal continuing education courses, ranging from subject and methodology courses to leadership, personal and social skills, as well as topics such as health and safety. The courses are offered by a wide range of University units, such as the Centre for University Continuing Education (ZUW), the Office for Equal Opportunities and the Safety Office. These courses supplement the courses offered by the *Cantonal Human Resources Office* and are geared to the needs of the employees. The management training offering was further expanded in the 2023 reporting year.
- **Cantonal courses:** As an employer, the Canton of Bern supports the broadening and deepening of the professional skills of its staff. In the central course program of the *Bern Cantonal Human Resources Office*, employees of the cantonal administration will find courses that support and facilitate their daily activities with concrete and practical content.

5.5.4 Fit for Future

The University of Bern is facing major challenges. The building infrastructure is partly outdated or will soon no longer be adequate, digitalization is changing the demands placed on teaching, research and collaboration, and the discrepancies between Switzerland and the EU have a direct impact on Switzerland as a center for academia.

In August 2021, the University Executive Board therefore approved a major program for the development of the University of Bern entitled [“Fit for Future”](#).

In 2022, a total of [twelve fields of action](#) were worked on that deal with topics such as University structures, digital transformation and research in an international context. New workplace concepts, an attractive campus life and the future of teaching are also of great importance to the University of Bern. The University is taking on the challenge of promoting lifelong learning, overcoming shortages of space, guaranteeing equal opportunities, implementing innovative ideas, and embracing an open leadership culture. In an interview in 2023, the former Rector of the University of Bern Christian Leumann and the Director of Administration Markus Brönnimann shed light on the challenges that the University will face in the future and how the “Fit for Future” program intends to tackle them. The first virtual town hall meetings started in November 2023. They offered the employees of the University the opportunity to meet the members of the University Executive Board and the project managers virtually and to get in touch with them. The twelve fields of action are presented and explained in the meetings.



6. Finances and governance

6.1 Finances

6.1.1 Funding

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The University of Bern is financed by the annual cantonal contribution as well as by other sources of funding, in particular basic and investment contributions from the federal government, contributions for students from intercantonal agreements (IUK) and external funding.

Basic funding: The share of the sponsoring canton remained relatively constant at 34.4% in 2022 and 35% in 2023. This balanced and reliable basic funding is an essential prerequisite for the independence of the University and its researchers. The contributions of other cantons in accordance with the *Intercantonal University Agreement (IUV)* and the basic contributions of the federal government expand the foundation of University independence. They were also stable in 2022/23, accounting for a total of around 27% of total funding.

External funding: In the reporting period, the share of external funding remained stable and at a high level at 39% in 2022 and 38% in 2023. The high proportion of competitively acquired external funding from the public promotion of research is considered proof of success for high academic performance: The researchers at the University of Bern were very committed and successful in competitively acquiring funds.

Transparency: The University of Bern draws up its financial statements using Swiss GAAP FER accounting standards. Swiss GAAP FER was created as a set of rules to facilitate and promote the comparability of annual financial statements. The primary principle of Swiss GAAP FER is to present a true and fair view of the net assets, financial position and results of operations.

6.1.2 Sustainable procurement and financial assets

Sustainable procurement: The University of Bern strives to increasingly consider sustainability criteria in procurement. It has already developed and implemented corresponding projects in the areas of cleaning agents and paper. It is also represented in the sustainable procurement network of Swiss universities. Since 2019, the University of Bern has had a [webshop](#) with over 50 articles. The range is constantly being expanded and ranges from hoodies to power banks. When selecting products, the webshop takes environmental and social sustainability aspects into account and provides information on the sustainability commitment of its suppliers on its website: The store partner Pandinavia, for example, pays attention to compliance with fair working conditions when choosing products. In addition, the webshop has been purchasing all items ordered via Pandinavia in a CO₂eq-neutral manner since 2019.

Financial investments: The University of Bern is also committed to sustainability in the area of financial investments and therefore, in 2018, decided to invest only in sustainable financial products in its asset management mandates.

6.2 Governance

Sustainability management: The University of Bern takes its ethical responsibility seriously and is committed to integrating sustainability as an interdisciplinary issue across all areas of the University and promoting the careful use of ecological, economic and social resources. The University has strategically anchored the topic in its mission statement and in its “Strategy 2030”. It also has a [sustainability mission statement](#) defining the principles to which the University wants to orient itself long term in the areas of research, teaching and business operations.

In order to be able to continuously develop further in the area of sustainability, the University sets itself corresponding goals, takes appropriate measures and reviews their implementation. This systematic process of quality assurance is based on the sustainability monitoring that the University conducts annually. Based on the findings obtained in the monitoring process, the University of Bern sets itself goals and defines measures for a period of four years. The sustainability goals are defined in the University’s quality strategy. The corresponding measures and responsibilities are defined in the University’s action plan and in the faculty’s action plans, which each have a section on sustainable development. Quality assurance is carried out as part of the University’s management loop.

In addition to sustainability monitoring, the results of which have been published every two years since 2016 in the [Sustainability Report](#) of the University of Bern, the University has had an annual [carbon footprint](#) since 2021. The first carbon footprint was prepared for the reference year 2019.

Organizational structure: In the organizational structure of the University of Bern, sustainability is anchored at a high level in the [Vice-Rectorate Quality and Sustainable Development](#). There has been an [Office for Sustainable Development](#) since 2012 (the Coordination Office for Sustainable Development until April 2023), as well as a permanent [Commission for Sustainable Development](#). All faculties, the University Executive Board, the intermediate staff, the students, the administrative management and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) are represented in the latter.

The Office for Sustainable Development supports the integration of the cross-cutting issue of sustainability into all areas of the university (teaching, research, continuing education, public relations and operations) by encouraging, supporting and linking sustainability activities in these areas. Since August 2023, the Vice-Rectorate Quality and Sustainable Development has been headed by Vice-Rector Prof. Heike Mayer.

Participation: Participation is a central instrument for shaping sustainable development. The University of Bern accordingly attaches great importance to participation and promotes co-determination among employees at all levels as well as students. The University involves its members in self-governance and involves them in decision-making processes. This is reflected in the University’s structure: All levels are represented in the University commissions and the Senate.

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