Aston Business School
BIRMINGHAM UK

SHARING INFORMATION ON PROGRESS

Report 2020 - 2022

PRME

This is our **Sharing Information on Progress** (SIP) Report on the Implementation of the **Principles for Responsible Management Education**

TRIPLE ACCREDITED · AACSB ACCREDITED · EQUIS ACCREDITED · ASSOCIATION OF MBAS ACCREDITED

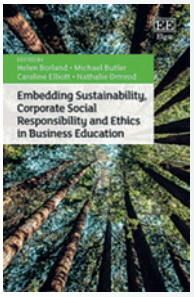
Foreword by Helen Higson

Professor of Higher Education Learning ond Management

As one of the founding members of the UKI Chapter in 2013, Aston University continues to keep sustainability at the core of its mission and values within its educational and research practices, and its wider partnerships.

The latter certainly shone though when navigating Covid19 challenges. The University's strong culture of collegiality and community was evident through a wide array of social interactions at a time when they were needed the most, as evidenced by the selection of initiatives in the last pages of Aston's previous SIP report.

With an increasing recognition of sustainability at the heart of our educational practices, this year academic colleagues from different business disciplines partnering with colleagues across the University came together to publish a book on their own practices when embedding sustainability, corporate social responsibility and ethics in business education. The book includes examples such as responsible management learning and non-linear decision-making gameplay and emphasises the importance of infusing the values of the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals into future curricula. In addition, all module specifications at Aston University will now include a 'sustainability and ethics' category, and thus in doing so will fully embed the requirements of our accreditations from AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA.



The following pages include a selection of best practice examples in response to both PRME's six principles and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the spirit of sharing, cooperating and co-producing across the PRME community, do feel free to get in touch with colleagues leading on sustainable projects of interest.

On with Aston University's sustainable journey of the past two years.

Professor Helen E Higson OBE DL

Associate Dean, Accreditations, Aston Business School

Aston University

Changing the world through employable graduates

Our courses are designed around the needs of industry. We create work-ready graduates who make an impact.

Welcoming and supportive culture

We make our students feel welcome on campus, and we support our students to thrive and succeed in their studies. Aston students are not just a number – the support that we give is personalised.

Diverse international community

Aston is a long-established destination for international students. We are a diverse and friendly place and home to more than 3000 international students from across the world and many different backgrounds. This creates a vibrant campus and a great atmosphere.

Excellent teachers

Our academic staff are excellent teachers, active researchers and often have extensive industry experience. They are renowned for writing the key textbooks that are used across the world for their particular discipline. Many are Fellows of the national Advance HE.

Transforming students through practical experience

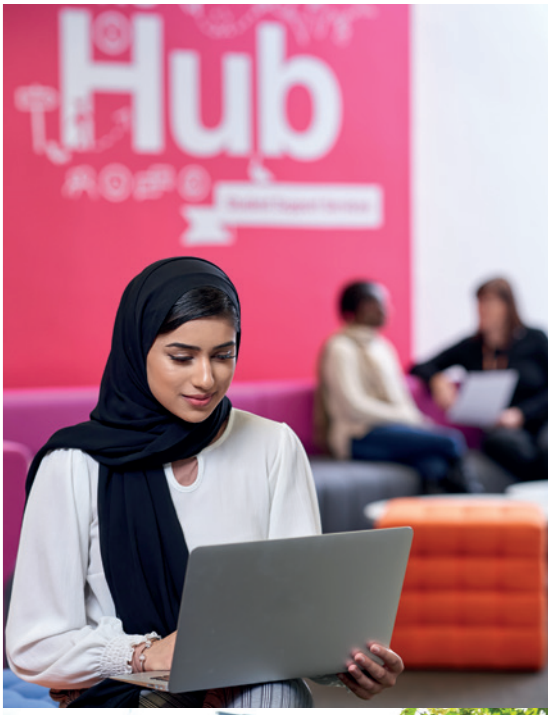
Our approach to education is practical, hands-on, and inspired by industry. Undergraduate students can apply for a one-year professional work placement, and along with Postgraduate students, have access to live business projects set by industry representatives. Addressing real life problems is part of the transformational learning experience at Aston.

Experiencing enterprise and innovation first hand

We are home to the Aston Centre for Growth and the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses programme, supporting companies to grow and thrive. Students can learn how to start their own business, join a family business, or stretch their creative skills by engaging in project work through our involvement in the Prince's Trust.

Vibrant campus community

Our students get the best of both worlds: a green, well-equipped, friendly campus in the centre of a major city.



Aston University's Sustainability Strategy

The development and articulation of Aston University's sustainability strategy (2018-2023) provides the opportunity clearly to communicate Aston's ambition, objectives, and priorities. Aston University strives to have a positive impact on all its beneficiaries, making economic, social, environmental and cultural responsibilities a priority, alongside the institution's commitment to education and research excellence. The aim is to embed sustainability throughout all working practices, as well as integrate it into student education, research and professional support services.

Vision

The University will strive to embed sustainability and social responsibility into all its practices in order to support its three main beneficiaries. All of our students and staff will get the opportunity to integrate sustainable values into their daily activities now and in the future to improve theirs and the University's local and global impact.

Defining Sustainability

Sustainability is about equity: a sustainable society is one in which there is equitable access to the Earth's resources both within and across generations. A sustainable organisation acts not only to ensure its own success, but also to benefit the wider community and maintain a natural, healthy environment. Sustainability-related issues such as natural resource scarcity, energy security and climate change, population growth, poverty and human health may impact the University's core beneficiaries – our students, businesses and other organisations, our region and wider society.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Aston University is also concerned about the wider social and economic impacts the university has on the world, hence Aston's contribution to achieving the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Realising the Sustainable Development Goals through responsible management education

PRME Principles applied to Aston University

Principle 1 | Purpose: To develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.

Principle 2 | Values: To incorporate into academic activities, curricula, and organisational practices the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.

Principle 3 | Method: To create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.

Principle 4 | Research: To engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.

Principle 5 | Partnership: To interact with managers of business corporations to extend the knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.

Principle 6 | Dialogue: To facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

Purpose

Principle 1 | Purpose: We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.

By focusing on the 'capabilities' development of our students, we promote an understanding of a sustainable global economy through learner-focused projects. The following case studies illustrate our systemic drive to embed sustainability into Aston University's curriculum, development of employability skills, and general relationship building. This selection of projects demonstrates a number of overlapping SDGs and shows a range of engagements from 'before' starting university, 'during' university and 'post' university, to ensure that principles are embedded throughout the student life-cycle. This fits with a wider Aston culture, epitomised by one our strap lines: Aston means business. We are deliberate in our actions so as to achieve greater impact and deliver 'suitability-ready' graduates to the world of employment.

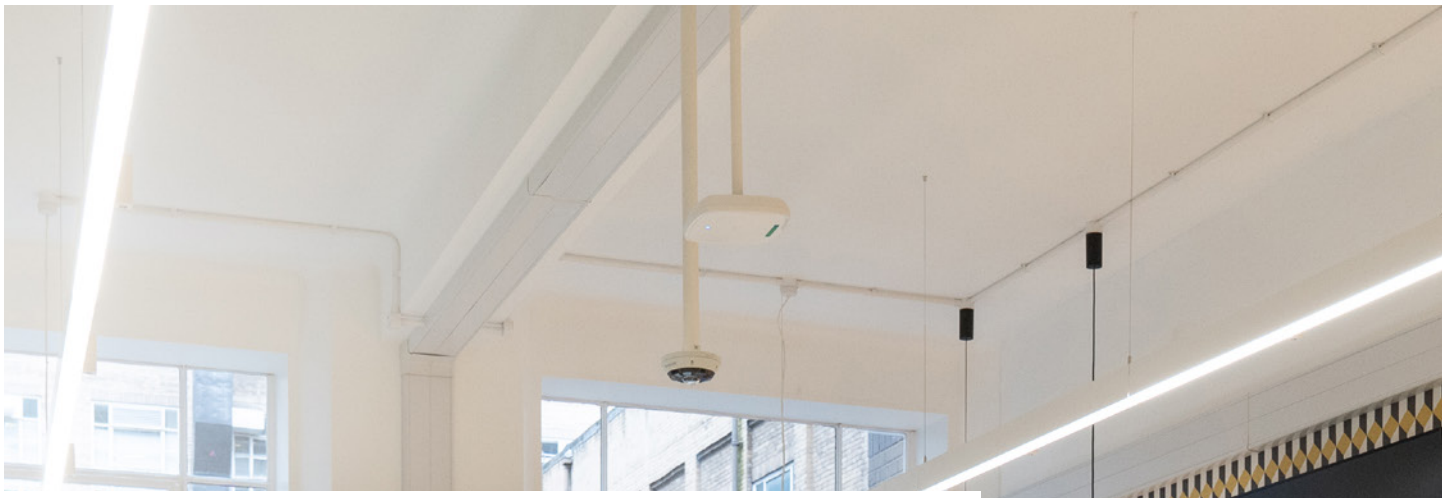
> **SDGs: 5 – 8 – 10**

Two conferences and associated events were hosted by Aston University to engage businesses in promoting sustainability in the workplace. Aimee Postle and Yasmin Ansari of the MBA Careers Team (BSS), along with Elsa Zenatti-Daniels, Postgraduate Student Development Lead, hosted international speakers and networking sessions at the second annual 'Aston Virtual World of Work & Sustainability Conference' in July 2021 for international MBA and master's students from across the world. Speakers included representatives from Entocycle, Seedrs, Adidas, PWC, KPMG, Zoom and Cisco, as well as academics from Haas Business School.

Within the framework of the 2021 postgraduate Aston Global Advantage programme, the College of Business and Social Sciences (BSS) ran another week-long event on 'Sustainability and the World of Work'. Organised by Elsa Zenatti-Daniels and titled "Our Common Future", the event focused on the Sustainable Development Goals and the urgency of responding to the challenges of climate change. Society was considered from a holistic perspective with organisations of all sizes having to address the challenge of decarbonisation or adopt carbon-offsetting practice. Participants looked at innovative practices and the emergence of new businesses offering solutions, changing the world of work and shaping a new future for students, thus pushing universities to rethink their curriculum and practices in order to prepare 'sustainability aware and ready' graduates.

With the 2022 Commonwealth Games taking place in Birmingham, Aston University students have been exposed to a wide range of thought-provoking perspectives, from the actual concept of sustainability to the sustainable legacy of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games with contributions from Aston's Centre in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship, Aston's Centre for Circular Economy and Advanced Sustainability and Aston's Low Carbon SMEs business-facing project. External organisations and speakers whose foci are on society and conservation included Nicola Peel, an award-winning environmentalist, the Citizens UK Birmingham Chapter with insights on community engagement and the way students and universities can effectively support communities on their doorstep, MakeUK for digital and green skills in the manufacturing sector and The Co-op for setting up co-operative businesses.

Dr Hannah Bartlett, Associate Pro Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion, has invited Aston staff and students to join two working groups to support black lives, to help decolonise the curriculum by revising the principles of curriculum design, content and delivery. For Aston's Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group (Inclusive Aston), racial equality at institutional level can only be achieved by assimilating the histories, perspectives, standpoints and experiences of students, staff and the communities which the university serves.



Aston was the UK pioneer university for making placements a compulsory part of its study programmes in the seventies. More recently, Aston Business School has formed a partnership with Virtual Internships to offer students the opportunity to work with flexible hours that fit around their studies in the career sector of their choice, in or outside the UK, while acquiring remote working competencies. Started in 2017 as a pilot to give students with restricted mobility (e.g., visa issues or personal circumstances) the possibility to still engage with a real organisation, the Virtual Internships Scholarship programme: Work Global, Stay Local has grown exponentially with a strong training and competencies development package during the pandemic. It has enabled Aston University students to continue working despite lockdowns and restrictions. The programme also fits within Aston's agenda of reducing its carbon footprint linked to international mobilities. In addition, Sarah Collins in the Careers and Placement Team administers and manages the Aston Placement Bursary Scheme to enable Masters students to complete valuable placements with small organisations unable to support paid internship. Funding covers placement opportunities for organisations who can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and social responsibility.

CASE STUDY

Professor of Cybersecurity management, Vladlena Benson, works with the Aston University's Student Recruitment and Outreach team to develop a set of digital educational resources for 'Cyber Girls First'. In the same vein, the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences marked International Women in Engineering Day with a series of STEM Superhero videos, contributions to the nationwide selfie campaign to raise the profile of women engineers and social media activity on the **@AstonEPS** channel which saw an increase of almost 3,000% on the day.

Values

Principle 2 | Values: We will incorporate into our academic activities, curricula, and organisational practices the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.

Aston University endeavours to embed the importance of social responsibility, inclusion and diversity throughout the organisation, and activities supporting this agenda can be found in all key areas. This has been particularly true during the recent experiences of the challenges of the pandemic and the war in Europe. As an organisation, we have pivoted to support staff, students and the wider community. Aston has achieved this through practical support such as loans and volunteering opportunities for staff, financial advice and training for local businesses and wide-spread initiatives for mental health and wellbeing for all. This section is about the organisation taking action (rather than just paying lip service to PRME) with a selection of examples where the organisation has enabled staff and students to become actively involved through targeted support.

> **SDGs: 4 – 11 – 16**

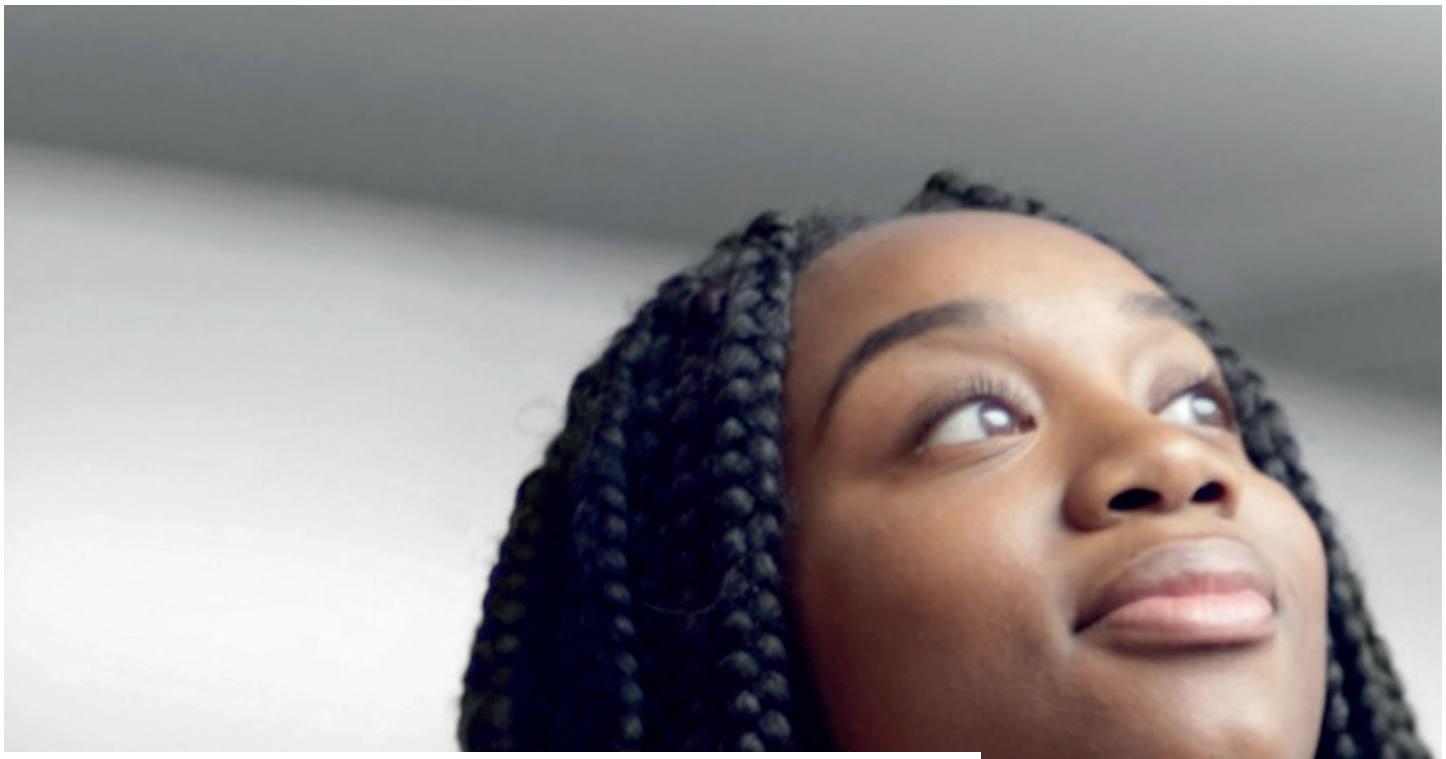
To this effect, the University ran a Sustainability Survey, including questions ranging from reducing carbon emissions from the energy used to educating students on the UN sustainable development goals. The aims of the survey were to find out how to increase awareness on sustainability as well to identify initiatives of importance to key University stakeholders and beneficiaries in driving change to become more sustainable and as a result we have taken a number of actions.

Aston University supports its staff with a range of initiatives including a Wellbeing intranet page, an interest-free loan scheme to assist new and existing international staff with spreading the costs of securing UK visas and taking up or remaining in employment at Aston University; and a Safe Space App to help anyone facing any problems raise queries or concerns anonymously. Good mental health is also a priority at Aston, as demonstrated by support initiatives ranging from depression, anxiety to PTSD and suicidal thoughts and a Bank of Mental Health First Aiders. With Sway - Mental health and wellbeing, the College of Business and Social Sciences shared useful tools to help staff look after themselves, whilst the Grief Café initiative offers support and comfort to those struggling and feeling isolated in their grief.

Due to the impact of the pandemic on staff mental health, the 2021 theme of wellbeing at Aston led to a variety of staff networks providing avenues for col-leagues to connect from across the University through @Aston Choir, BAME+ staff network, Book club, Careers network, Disabled Staff Lunches, Inspiring Women Network, LGBT+, ME (Minority Ethnic) Group, Parents network, Walking group, and Yammer group at Aston amongst others. An Aston graduate, Helen Williams, also created a wellbeing website, Thrive at Home, for those looking to learn and devel-op new skills whilst being at home. On their part, students are always able to reach out to Aston's Enabling Team.

The staff volunteering scheme encourages staff members to get involved in local charitable organisations and offers the equivalent of two days paid annual leave to take part in volunteering activities to support the local community.

Finally, within the current period of global uncertainty as a result of the pandemic and major geopolitical developments including the invasion of Ukraine, Aston Uni-versity has taken the following actions. Research involving transfer of money into Russia has been suspended; Alison Levey, Associate PVC (Students), has been leading on work to support Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian students; Philip Mizen, Associate PVC Researcher Development, continues to work with CARA to identify ways in which Aston University can contribute to supporting displaced academics. The University has reserved an additional £500k to support the above efforts and to create more headroom in the Student Hardship Fund to support an anticipated in-crease in student hardship applications.



CASE STUDY

Sustainability has been a central core to the College of Business & Social Sciences Master Programme personal development stream. Since 2017, and as part of the Aston Global Advantage Professional Development Programme, students have been completing a team-based business challenge related to sustainability and social responsibility.
In 2019 in the first onslaught of the pandemic, Aston started partnering with external organisations who sponsored and set the brief for the challenge. In 2020, the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce set both September and January cohorts the task of developing models to ensure the sustainable legacy of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games from a social, economic, environmental and cultural perspective. To this effect, we partnered in 2021 with the Legacy Team of the Commonwealth Games for students to test and further develop the legacy road map drawn by the Games Sustainability Team in collaboration with the West Midlands Combined Authorities focusing on the following three pillars: 1) Carbon and Air Quality; 2. Circular economy and 3) Conservation. The 2022 Games has the ambition of being the most sustainable games to date, the selected student projects will have a direct impact on the implementation of the sustainability strategy of the games.

Method

Principle 3 | Method: We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.

Aston University has been exploring practical integration of PRME's ideals and responsible leadership into the development of learning and teaching opportunities that underpin the development and support of future talent that will go on to impact the workforce both locally and wider. The focus on developing knowledge, skills and behaviours that takes into account key aspects of responsible leadership and ethics has featured through multiple programmes and examples as follows. The combination of these efforts across programmes, curricula and other initiatives has marked Aston's commitment to provide opportunities for everyone as exemplified below.

> **SDGs: 4 – 5 – 10**

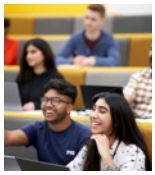
Having won the PRME UK & Ireland 2021 Seed Funding Competition for her project entitled 'Disaster Ethics – a multiplayer, emergent visual novel', Dr Lauren Traczykowski (Aston Law School) is developing an innovative video game-type teaching tool mimicking real world decision-making by professionals responding to the same crisis or emergency. Participants will need to make ethical decisions for effective disaster responses. A prototype of the game will be made Open Access and available to all PRME UK & Ireland members.

From a wider perspective beyond business studies, Dr Sarah Junaid (School of Engineering and Technology) is on an international advisory team and is the co-author of an Engineering Ethics Toolkit launched early 2022 by the Engineering Professors Council (EPS) and the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng). The toolkit is a valuable resource to help engineering educators integrate ethics content into teaching. Sarah has also co-authored a paper with colleagues in South Africa titled "Repositioning ethics at the heart of engineering graduate attributes" in the Australasian Journal of Engineering Education.

With sustainable change intrinsically linked to boardroom decisions, Dr Lloyd Parsons (MBA and CMI Programmes) has been developing and embedding a core workshop into the Executive MBA entitled "Responsible Leadership" in order to give executives the opportunity to learn about the UN SDG's and to position the purpose of business and its leaders as being focussed on more than just profits.

Finally, in recognition of Aston's commitment, AdvanceHE has conferred an Athena SWAN Gold Award to the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences and an Athena SWAN Bronze Award to Aston Business School and Aston Law School. The award recognises and celebrates good practices in higher education and research institutions towards the advancement of gender equality, representation, progression and success for all. Aston University also partners with Aston Villa Women Football Club to deliver events on Women in Leadership with sessions on motherhood and maternity in professional women's football and women representation in sports governance.

CASE STUDY



The mission of the Aston Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) is to make diversity and enterprise everyone's business. Launched in 2020, the CREME Student Engagement Project brings together researchers, employers and students and provides students with opportunities to gain professional experience and valuable insights from the entrepreneurs working with CRÈME. In this win-win situation, employers gain the support of creative and innovative students and the output from this collaboration feeds into the research of the Centre.

Research

Principle 4 | Research: We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.

Aston University's mission is to deliver research that changes lives for the better. As a public research university, Aston University fosters collaboration between students, academics and industry leaders, bringing together people from all backgrounds and disciplines in the pursuit of knowledge, academic excellence, and a better world. For over 70 years, Aston University has pushed boundaries at the heart of the UK's second city. The University has embraced diversity, led change, and championed learning, empowering researchers with access to cutting-edge facilities and investment opportunities. Aston University aims to magnify the impact of its research beyond academia, to the benefit of all.

> **SDGs: 3 – 10 – 11 – 12 – 13 – 15**

Social Value

Professor Andy Lymer, Dr Halima Sacranie and Dr Lin Tian (Accounting Department) and Dr Kanimozhi Narayanan (Work and Organisation Department) have received funding from the Gambling Commission. The two-year research project will be co-designed with frontline service providers in Birmingham City Council (BCC) and will explore the impact of harmful gambling on individual and family finances. The project will operate over two years and will focus on BCC's housing and lettings tenants. The team will design and then evaluate a toolkit for front line workers to help better identify those at risk from significant negative impacts on their finances from gambling activity and support work looking to improve targeting of a range of possible interventions.

Aston's Centre for Migration and Forced Displacement has received funding from Midlands Innovation to focus on refugee integration in the West Midlands. This opportunity will enable colleagues to work across disciplines, and with practitioners, to understand best practice examples in local authorities. It is hoped that this research will deliver results that can help transform the processes adopted throughout the region for refugee integration.

Professor Prasanta Dey's research proposal entitled 'Waste to Health and Wealth', in collaboration with Meru University of Science and Technology, Kenya, was shortlisted for the prestigious Newton Prize.

Professor Monder Ram (CREME), and Michelle Richey (Loughborough University), have been awarded a prestigious British Academy of Management and The Society for the Advancement of Management Studies (SAMS) grant to undertake research exploring entrepreneurship in Kenya. The collaboration includes the work of colleagues from the Centre for Entrepreneurs and The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network (TERN), as well as Dr Raymond Randall (Sheffield University) and Professor M.N. Ravishankar (Loughborough University). The project will involve a focused study of the impact and transfer of a refugee support programme across Africa.

Professor Anna Hine (HLS) and Dr Yordan Raykov (EPS) are collaborating with Isogenica Ltd on the development of an innovative, proprietary bioinformatics tool, based on sophisticated machine learning principles, to identify high-quality antibodies for human therapeutics applications more efficiently.

Environmental Value

Professor Jun Du (Economics, Finance and Entrepreneurship Department) has received funding from Midland innovation to develop research on the Green Recovery and Economic Renewal of the Midlands, with a focus on understanding the driving forces of growth through green enterprises and green innovation and diffusion, where green skills play a central role. This collaborative project involves academics from Birmingham University and Warwick University.

Dr Ying Miao and Dr Ed Turner (Politics and International Relations Department) in multidisciplinary collaboration with Nottingham University, have been awarded an EPSRC/NERC grant on decarbonisation. The VTTESS project will help to develop sustainable district heating systems, while addressing socioeconomic barriers and constraints in the uptake of community-based heating networks. This project is part of the UK's 2050 carbon neutral target.

Dr Mirjam Roeder (EBRI) leads the environmental impact and wider sustainability assessment within the interdisciplinary project "GHG removal by accelerated peat formation". The project is funded as part of the Greenhouse Gas Removal programme and is part of the second wave of the government's Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF).

Dr Luciano Batista was selected by the UKRI EPSRC to discuss and define priority research areas for the UK Circular Economy theme. Luciano suggested embedding the CE priority areas defined by the select group into a wider, but coordinated, EPSRC research programme initiative under what he termed Grand Circular Economy Challenges (GCEC) programme, which will facilitate budget allocation and utilisation.

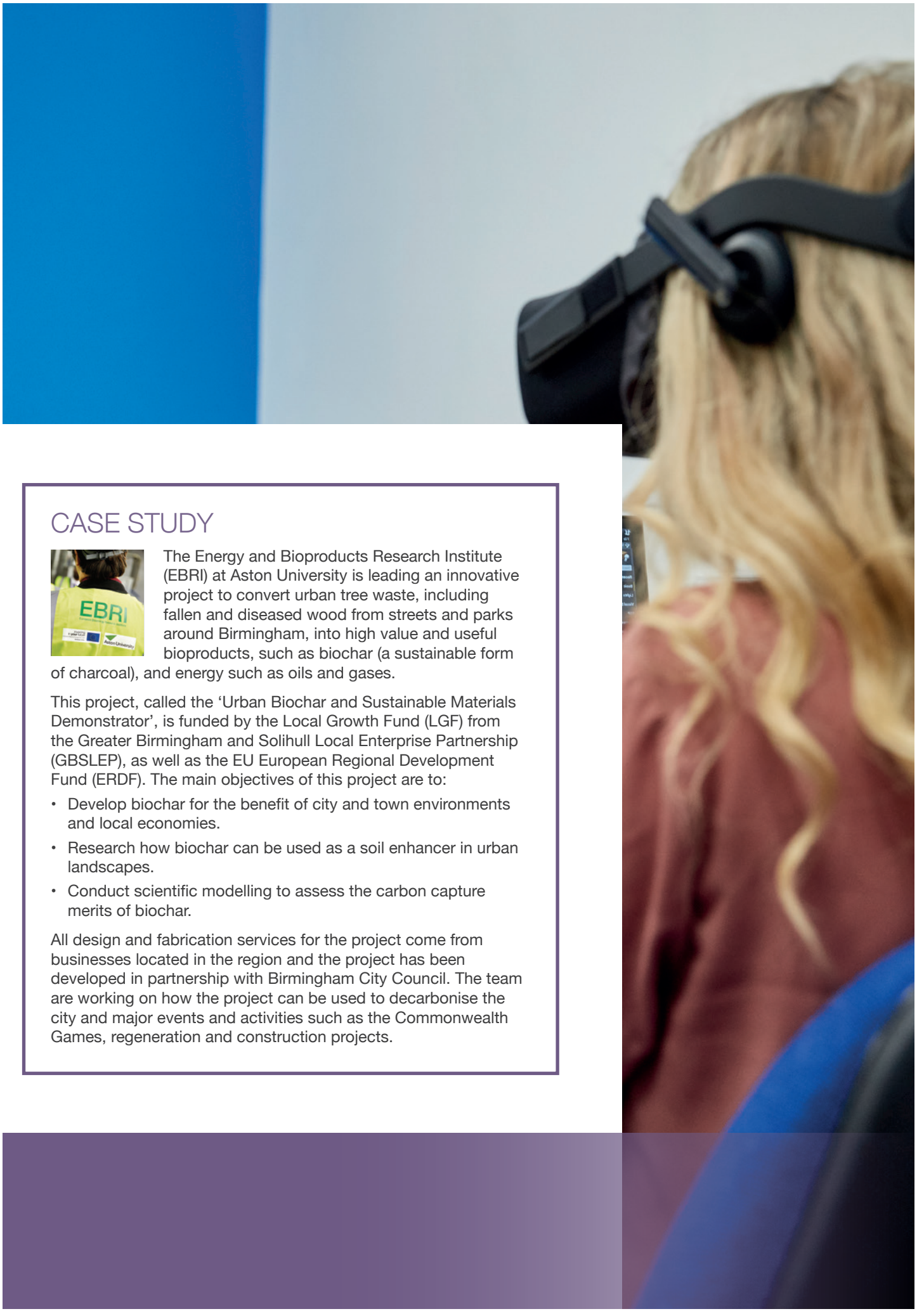
Thanks to funding from the Royal Society, Dr Yang Yang (EBRI) collaborates with colleagues from Hefei University of Technology (China) to develop high performance road paving materials produced from pyrolysis of waste plastics.

Economic Value

Funded by Midlands Innovation and in collaboration with Keele University, Loughborough University and Birmingham University, Professor Prasanta Dey, Dr Sian Joel-Edgar, Dr Oscar Rodriguez-Espindola and Professor Ali Emrouznejad (Operations and Information Management Department), along with Professor Pawan Budhwar (Head of Aston Business School), Professor Claire Farrow (College of Life and Health Sciences) and Professor Soumyadeb Choudhury (Visiting Academic Fellow) are developing knowledge on the dynamic and complex interaction of medium and long-term societal effects of COVID-19 pandemic on SMEs through sustainable transformative strategies. The latter will focus on reducing inequalities and vulnerabilities, as well as building a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable society. This collaborative project will be delivered.

Aston's Low Carbon SMEs team, led by Professor Prasanta Dey (Operations and Information Management Department), has received funding from the European Regional Development Fund to help SMEs of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership's achieve lower carbon footprint. The team are currently facilitating SMEs in the Black Country LEP to lowering its carbon footprint through energy efficiency and other measures.

Dr Luciano Batista (Aston's Centre for Circular Economy and Advanced Sustainability) and Ahmed Rezk (Aston Institute of Urban Technology and the Environment) have secured funding from the UKRI Science and Technology Facilities Council to work with other academics, NGOs and local authorities in Kenya and Uganda. The 'IoT Enabled Cold Chain for Kenya and Uganda Fish Markets' project involves the development of a prototype for a smart cooling container equipped with rechargeable thermal energy, IoT temperature sensing technology and GPS to monitor fish farming logistics and supply chains in real-time. Designed to be installed in local three-wheelers (e.g., Tuk Tuk vehicles) and motorbikes, the innovative and affordable solution will minimise fish losses, improve small farmers' incomes, and improve food security in the region; it also has great potential to support vaccine storage and transportation through areas of difficult access.



CASE STUDY

The Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute (EBRI) at Aston University is leading an innovative project to convert urban tree waste, including fallen and diseased wood from streets and parks around Birmingham, into high value and useful bioproducts, such as biochar (a sustainable form of charcoal), and energy such as oils and gases.

This project, called the 'Urban Biochar and Sustainable Materials Demonstrator', is funded by the Local Growth Fund (LGF) from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP), as well as the EU European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The main objectives of this project are to:

- Develop biochar for the benefit of city and town environments and local economies.
- Research how biochar can be used as a soil enhancer in urban landscapes.
- Conduct scientific modelling to assess the carbon capture merits of biochar.

All design and fabrication services for the project come from businesses located in the region and the project has been developed in partnership with Birmingham City Council. The team are working on how the project can be used to decarbonise the city and major events and activities such as the Commonwealth Games, regeneration and construction projects.

Partnership

Principle 5 | Partnership: We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.

Aston's commitment to supporting communities near and far is second nature to the University, which has developed strong partnerships with a number of regional institutions and bodies over the past decades. As industries and communities are amongst its core beneficiaries, Aston University continues to build business development solutions, connect effectively and extensively with our community and region and takes its strengths to the wider world in order to better contribute to society, as per the following partnership examples.

> **SDGs: 3 – 7 – 8 – 11 – 13 – 17**

Organisations' Environmental Responsibilities

Through Aston's KTP programme, Dr Muhammad Imran and Dr Michal Konecny are collaborating with Lanemark Combustion Ltd to develop state of the art, low emission and low carbon fuel, gas-fired burners for process heating applications with newly developed, innovative burner design software.

Thanks to Business Interaction Vouchers by the Biomass and Biorefinery Network (BBNet), Dr Jude Onwudili (EBRI/CEAC) continues his work with Calor Gas UK (a subsidiary of SHV Energy) on "Catalytic conversion of bio-derived feedstocks to bioLPG component gases".

Professor Nick Theodorakopoulos (WON) and Professor Monder Ram (CREME) hosted the Diverse Supply Chains event with representatives from partner organisations HS2, Balfour Beatty Vinci, Natwest and Birmingham City Council to explain how the Diverse Supply Chains project will support diverse SMEs (in the GBSLEP area) to become fit to procure and access the supply chain of large corporations.

Aston Business School is a project partner on a Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) funded initiative aimed at improving the energy efficiency across the UK's 5.9 million small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The project brings together experts from Aston Business School's Low Carbon SME team, arbnco, Centrica, Energy Systems Catapult, Durham County Council and sustainable finance company, Cyan Finance. The aim is to develop a prototype Digital Energy Efficiency Platform (DEEP) that plans to optimise a business' total energy consumption and the energy performance of its premises.

Dr Timothy Whitehead (Mechanical Engineering and Design) has been awarded a GCRF Challenge Clusters Grant by UKRI for his project in utilising frontier technology and user-centred design to add value to plastic waste, facilitating entrepreneurship and employment. This is in collaboration with Loughborough University, De Montfort University and the NGO Tech for Trade. A key element of this project is the development of two hubs in underfunded GCRF regions (Rwanda and Nigeria) to turn plastic waste into 3D printing filament and create valuable new products.

Aston's Advanced Services Group has participated with Innovate UK in a 'Heating-as-a-Service' project with Baxi Heating. The 'Digital Servitization Demonstrator' will be open to industry, Government and investors looking to exploit new business models in heating systems. Baxi, and their parent group BDR Thermea, expect the demonstrator to support their drive towards de-carbonisation and help them to reduce fuel poverty across social housing heat networks.

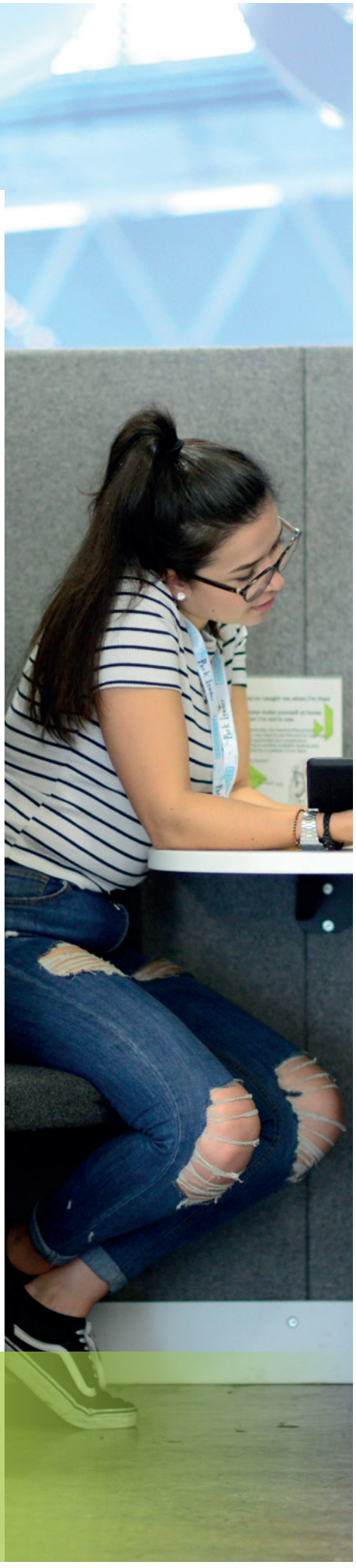
Organisations' Social Responsibilities

Within the field of Health and Wellbeing, Dr Céline Benoit (Sociology and Policy Department) works with the Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BCHC) to represent the College as Senior Partner in their Community Connexions programme to co-design a sustainable community engagement framework in public health. Dr Carl Senior and Dr Jason Thomas (Psychology), in partnership with Alpharmaxim, a health care communications company, are exploring how various strategies can improve clinicians' prescribing behaviour. Dr Boris Kysela (AMS) has been an invited international expert and guarantor on the successful EU application for the European Regional Development Fund, The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, to contribute on the Biobank for Cancer and Rare Diseases project.

Within the community, the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) and Punch Records have collaborated for a second year to deliver the P WORD, a leadership development programme for diverse artists and entrepreneurs based in the West Midlands. On his part, and in partnership with State University of Londrina in Brazil, Dr Diego R. Faria (CS) has been awarded a grant by the IEEE Robotics and Automation Special Interest Group to replicate previous experiments in Brazil with children with attention deficit in Portugal (ADHD, Autism, etc.). Committed to helping disadvantaged communities, the project "ENGagement through Adaptive GamEs: Neurocognitive Training Intervention to Monitor Progress of Children with Attention Deficit" (ENGAGE) introduces an innovative intervention tool to boost and maintain the concentration levels of children with intellectual disability and attention deficit.

CASE STUDY

COVID-19 has impacted many businesses, and communities, Professor Mark Hart, Enterprise Research Centre Deputy Director, and Associate Director of the Aston Centre for Growth has been been appointed as a member of the new Expert Advisory Council for the Help to Grow management scheme. The scheme brings together government and business with the aim of supporting small business leaders to increase productivity, invest and grow their business, while levelling-up productivity across the UK.



Dialogue

Principle 6 | Dialogue: We will facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

Dialogue and debate are at the core of Aston's strategy, from pedagogical, research, business or partnership perspectives. With Inclusive Aston, the University's vision is also to create an environment in which all individuals can operate and engage at all levels regardless of their personal circumstances. Exchanges are foundations for knowledge development and cocreation, as highlighted in the diverse examples presented below.

> **SDGs: 8 – 10 – 11 – 12 – 13 – 16**

Dr Graeme Hayes (Social Sciences and Humanities School) wrote a blog, 'Disobedience, Protest, and the Pandemic: Climate Change and Citizen Action under Conditions of Social Distancing' for the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity on climate change and civil disobedience after the pandemic. "Civil disobedience is not just a checklist of components, but a tradition of morally purposeful action and an expression of citizenship". As the pandemic ushers in new social norms, and political and economic interests may seek to capitalise on the crisis to further deepen social inequality, the way social movements rethink their tactics may have profound consequences for the effectiveness of future protests.

Aston University hosted the Global South Dialogue on Economic Crime (GSDEC)'s inaugural conference themed 'Financial Regulation: A global south perspective' in August 2021. The conference focused on examining whether the current global financial regulatory framework is best suited to combat financial and economic crime in the Global South effectively.

Businesses in manufacturing, engineering, waste management, construction, financial services, agricultural, packaging, as well as food and drinks industries, are able to receive the support from the Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute (EBRI) at Aston University. Led by Tim Miller (EBRI's director of engagement), EBRI's Low Carbon Challenge Consultations support business decision-makers to evaluate and implement opportunities to move towards Net Zero while also generating business growth and additional community value.

Aston University has teamed up with local community partners and Transport for the West Midlands and Birmingham City Council to encourage more students and staff to use sustainable modes of transport.

CASE STUDY

Aston University has developed two podcast series – Aston means business and Society matters to share fresh perspectives on society, business and enterprise.

In the March 2021 episode of our Aston means business podcast, host and journalist Steve Dyson spoke to Amy Foster, founder of Nomad HR and Recruitment in Atherstone, Warwickshire, who has launched a social enterprise to help find jobs for the young unemployed. She's already got six back into work, including a homeless youth. Also speaking on the podcast Nathalie Ormrod, local director of the UN's Principles for Responsible Management Education at Aston Business School, praises Ms Foster's "inspirational journey" as "heart-warming" and "courageous".

In the September 2021 episode of Aston means business Prasanta Dey, professor of operations and information management at Aston Business School, explains how his Low Carbon SMEs project is set to save 6,000 tonnes of CO_2 – more than five times its initial target. Lee Cole, managing director of Paint 360, just one of the 165 companies involved, and Jamal Lea, project manager of Low Carbon SMEs, discuss details of the achievements to date.

Society matters is a podcast from the School of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) at Aston University, which explores some of the fascinating work of academics within the School on current issues facing society. The following episodes are examples of dialogue related to social responsibility and sustainability:

Understanding refugee journeys

The slave trade: Birmingham's industrial links to this shameful history

Disaster ethics: intervention policies for natural hazards

Tackling the inequalities of COVID-19

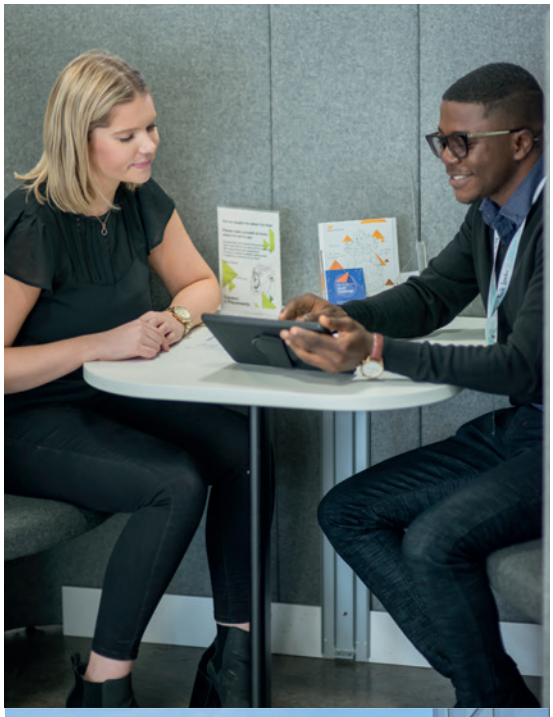
Continued Commitment and Objectives

As illustrated in the previous pages, Aston University's commitment to PRME's Principles remains as strong as ever to prepare our students, support academic research and closely work with partners in order to meet tomorrow's sustainable and ethical challenges.

To this effect, we will continue to:

- raise PRME awareness at Aston University amongst students, faculty, researchers and partners
- grow faculty engagement through PRME curriculum, research and enterprise activities
- support contributions to student writing as well as research and pedagogy competitions
- engage with Aston's Student Union to develop links with PRME Global Students
- encourage faculty to join UNPRME working groups
- develop stronger internal and external marketing communications to showcase Aston University's PRME activities and local partner organisations' sustainable initiatives
- play an active role in the PRME Midlands network
- promote PRME regionally and beyond alongside the Global Compact initiative

It is therefore with great anticipation that we look forward to hosting the UK and Ireland PRME Chapter's 10th Anniversary in 2023.



Contact:

Nathalie Ormrod
Aston University's PRME Director
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"Sustainability is about equity: a sustainable society is one in which there is equitable access to the Earth's resources both within and across generations. A sustainable organisation acts not only to ensure its own success, but also to benefit the wider community and maintain a natural, healthy environment."

Aston University's Sustainability Vision 2020-2024

Aston University
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COVID-19

Here's how Aston University is handling it

Publication date: June 2020

A message from Helen Higson

A UNIVERSITY SINCE 1966

COVID-19 has caused a significant amount of disruption and distress to our community of staff, students and graduates.

Our number one priority at this time is the safety and wellbeing of our students, staff and the beneficiaries we serve in the wider community.

In the past months, we have witnessed changes in our lives and working habits including teaching, researching and engagement methods. Aston University has risen to these new challenges with speed, efficacy and resilience, in order to ensure that our students remained at the heart of our strategy, and that our staff were fully supported in adapting to new ways of working. This report highlights many examples of good and inspirational practice.

Within Aston Business School, our mission and goals remain to enhance enterprise and enterprises, and to continue to support the development and regeneration of the West Midlands, local organisations and communities. It has never been more important to ensure that the opportunities we create are made available to all members of our society.

In this challenging period, and as a dedicated member of PRME, Aston University will continue to uphold its strong values of care, support, development, dialogue and partnerships for a stronger sustainable future together.

Keep safe. Keep well.

Professor Helen E Higson OBE DL
Associate Dean, Accreditations,
Aston Business School

COVID-19

Here's how Aston University is handling it

Aston University takes their staff and student welfare very seriously. A dedicated team has been put in place to closely monitor and manage the Coronavirus situation with information, guidance and support posted and updated online on a regular basis. Everyone within the university has an active role to play and has risen to the challenge over the past few weeks.

Wash your hands regularly with soap and water

Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing

Dispose of any used tissues in the bin and wash your hands afterwards

Current students

Grading placements, visas and more

A guide available online answers frequently asked questions regarding studies, visas, exams, accommodation and placements, and is updated as per advice from the Public Health England, Universities UK and the NHS.

Most learning is available via remote channels, including FAQ pages, **Assessment and Examinations** updates and dedicated teams in place to answer queries and reassure students (e.g. teaching, assessments, exams, absences and visa queries).

Students affected in their personal lives as well as their studies are offered advice on health and emotional support (**health advice page**) and can also seek general support from **The Hub** or by contacting **student@aston.ac.uk.** Students may reach out to colleagues in the University if they are feeling distressed: the University's counselling and wellbeing team has put together a guidance page to support staff with conversations with students who may be distressed. This process will help colleagues to assess the student's situation and what to do, depending on the severity of the situation. It also provides information on the resources and services available to students.

Social distancing advice from the UK government is posted online **here** including further health advice from **nhs.uk**. Students facing financial hardship can find information on available funding online. Associate Deans have access to all the student communications that are being sent out in relation to COVID-19.

An accessible and quick Q&A menu has been set up to support and reassure students concerning their learning, teaching, academic performance and other aspects of their studying at Aston University:

> **General study**
> **Exams and Assessments**
> **Accommodation**
> **Careers and Placement**
> **International**

The Team Entrepreneurs from Aston Business Enterprise Development undergraduate course have been doing great work virtually during their coaching sessions. The team live streamed their discussion on Keith Ferrazzi's HBR webinar 'Getting virtual teams right' **See LinkedIn video here.**

With degree congregation ceremonies being postponed, the university is organising online celebrations for all the new graduates around the world on their original ceremony dates. All are invited to join in on the @AstonAlumni and @AstonUniversity channels, using the hashtag #VirtualAstonGrads in order to share photos or short video messages of congratulations on the day, and to like and share posts from the graduates.

Applicants and offer holders (UK)

Exams, interviews and more

Plans have been put in place to ensure and deliver a fair and transparent admissions service to all applicants. Aston University is working closely with UCAS to ensure that students will not be disadvantaged as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. An online guide answers some frequently asked questions regarding admissions and is updated regularly in response to advice from Public Health England, the Department for Education, UCAS, the Office for Students and Universities UK.

Applicants and offer holders (international)

Pre-sessional English classes, deposits and more

With the outbreak of Coronavirus causing concern and disruption to international offer-holders, Aston University will continue to show flexibility and will publish regular updates online via the University's WeChat account and Facebook groups concerning UG/Foundation/PG offer-holders, English language requirements, pre-sessional English options for September 2020 entry and Tier 4 Visa or CAS with Aston University's expert visa team.

Campus facilities

Library, mentoring, LDC and more

Measures to protect the health and wellbeing of the students, staff and wider public have been taken to ensure that key services continue to operate, and that students' studies are not affected. Library and counselling services are operating via online channels and telephone to minimise risks as the situation evolves.

Quick links

> **Can I still access the Library resources?**
> **Can I book an appointment with the Learning Development Centre?**
> **Can I still receive support from the Student Advice Team?**
> **Can I still work with my peer mentor/mentee?**

The Student Advice Team remains available via email with appointments offered via phone and Skype. Likewise, peer mentoring activities are offered via e-mail and other remote means (i.e. Skype) with guidance on managing e-mentoring relationships.

Health advice

Coronavirus facts, mental health, isolation and more

Aston University closely monitors and manages the Coronavirus situation, acting on the advice of Public Health England, Universities UK and the NHS. Advice on social distancing and FAQs provides facts on the virus and guidance on what to do if one feels unwell.

Quick links

> **What is coronavirus?**
> **What is the risk to the UK?**
> **What are the symptoms of coronavirus?**
> **How does coronavirus spread?**
> **What is Aston doing about Coronavirus?**
> **I'm a parent/guardian and I'm concerned about my children being at university, is there anyone I can contact?**
> **What do I do if I have symptoms?**
> **I have an underlying health condition or I am experiencing symptoms, what can I do?**
> **Why don't all Aston students and staff wear masks on campus?**
> **Who should I contact if I feel unwell?**
> **Who can I speak to if I am concerned?**
> **I feel alone and isolated, what can I do?**

Students self-isolating are asked to let the University know via email to **engagement@aston.ac.uk**. A number of resources is available to support students who are feeling stressed such as **Student Minds** and the **Big White Wall**. For specific concerns or queries, students can contact **safety@aston.ac.uk** or report via the **SafeZone app**. In addition, the university's counselling and wellbeing team has put together a guidance page to support staff with conversations with students who may be distressed.

Universities support systems can all be found in the Health and Wellbeing newsletter **here**.

University staff

Working remotely, dependants, travel and more

Through various communications ranging from management emails to departmental meetings online and university newsletters, the University has shown its deep appreciation for the rallying support that Aston University staff have shown during these unprecedented times.
Staff health and welfare remain of paramount importance with advice, guidance and support to managers and employees posted on the staff intranet about coronavirus. HR has put together two new documents in response to the current situation:

> **'Coronavirus and Mental Health'**: strategies for coping with the stresses and strains of remote working (posted on the staff wellbeing page entitled 'NEW! Coronavirus & Mental Health'
> **'Managing remote working'**: how to adjust to a new way of working with individual and group methods to adopt to get through this period of isolation **here**.

Other resources available to support staff while working from home include:
> Setting up their home computer workstation
> Managing in a remote environment, including guidance on the physical work environment, work equipment and mental health and wellbeing
> Coronavirus and mental health
> How to be a respectful and empathetic co-worker during COVID-19

All staff at Aston University can access free online support with **Big White Wall** if they are suffering from work-related stress, struggling to sleep or simply need someone to talk to. Another platform, **SilverCloud**, offers secure, immediate access to online CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) programmes, tailored to staff specific needs and specialising in stress, anxiety, depression and body image. Finally, all employees of Aston University have access to the employee assistance programme, **PAM Assist**, which offers free confidential advice and support across a range of issues, both personal and work related, including bereavement.

The college of Business and Social Sciences has put together a Sway outlining useful tools for staff to look after themselves during these difficult times **here**. Additional wellbeing webinars and material include yoga and digital therapy such as breathing exercises. A virtual book club has also been set up to keep staff engaged and supported.

With **COVID-19 - Share your stories!** staff are encouraged to share stories about the actions that they have taken to help e.g. supplying PPE to the NHS, making and distributing hand sanitiser, and even Conference Aston offering rooms for key workers. **Yammer – Stay connected, share stories and more!** is another way to connect and engage across the University, especially in the current remote environment, checking on loved ones and colleagues, taking breaks from computers, and sending photos of daily walks and exercise. The **Working from home - pets edition** remains a popular initiative amongst staff sharing photographs of their beloved and supportive pets at home. Staff are invited to continue sending through useful health and wellbeing strategies.

Video conferencing and online collaboration have become vital tools and Aston University currently has fully licenced and supported versions of the following collaboration software: **Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex and Blackboard Collaborate**.

In terms of learning, teaching and research, staff are supported in developing new skills with a range of eLearning courses available on the staff intranet page including managing conference calls and online meetings. **Keypath online learning** resources of videos about designing **online programme can be found here**.

The **'Solve – self-service'** portal provides information on how to access University systems and services remotely is available via the self-service portal Solve or through the staff intranet under 'Digital Services'. Aston technical staff along with other universities and research institutes across the country have been real heroes behind the scenes: **See here**.

Since working remotely incurs costs, guidance has been provided on claiming allowance from HMRC towards the increased costs associated with working from home.

Aston means business: 'SMEs dealing with COVID-19'

Aston University's **Centre for Growth** offers a range of business growth and support programmes to SMEs in the Midlands. Aston Business School's new podcast series available on Spotify provides essential advice to business leaders, entrepreneurs and students. Aston's academics and business professionals are interviewed by Steve Dyson, a business journalist and former daily newspaper editor who has presented dozens of regional programmes for BBC's HARDtalk series. Current podcasts include:

> Simon Greenfield, managing director of Colour Cubed Creative Communications, and Mark Hart, professor of small business and entrepreneurship at Aston Business School: the pandemic's impact on businesses.

> La'Toyah Lewis founder of Rising Stars Property Solutions CIC a third sector property management company and Paula Whitehouse Director of the Aston Centre for Growth about balancing financial and social sustainability.

> Peter Monks co-founder of Shakespeare Distillery and Mark Hart Professor of Entrepreneurship and Small Business about how businesses are adapting in the short term and the long term. Listen on Spotify

> Rosie Ginday of Miss Macaroon a social enterprise business about how she is supporting the mental health and wellbeing of her staff during this crisis and Dr Wladislaw Rivkin an expert in leadership, wellbeing and employee resilience.

> Alec Anderson, Managing Director of Koolmill Systems Limited and Dr Geoff Parkes about how the crisis impacts on businesses managing operations internationally and. Listen on Spotify

> Olu Orugboh, founder of Synergy Organisational Solutions about building resilience and Mark Hart, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Small Business

> Sarah Beattie, Managing Director of FunFest Ltd a holiday childcare company, and employment law expert Kathy Daniels about the UK government's Job Retention Scheme and. Listen on Spotify

> Joe Fearn, Director of CircusMASH, Lee Hopley from the Enterprise Research Centre on the UK government's package of financial measures and Mark Hart, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Small Business about the impact of COVID-19 on SMEs

> Dr Ali Bigdeli, from the Advanced Services Group who introduces servitization, a business model which focusing on the services provided by manufacturers, rather than the product. Listen on Spotify

> Dr Wladislaw Rivkin, Lecturer in the Work and Organisational Psychology Department at Aston Business School: interplay of stressors, leadership and other resources in predicting employees' health well-being and performance in organisations.

> 'What happens when the money runs out' with Chris Umfreville, a lecturer in law, and former lawyer who specialises in researching and teaching company law, corporate insolvencies and rescues.

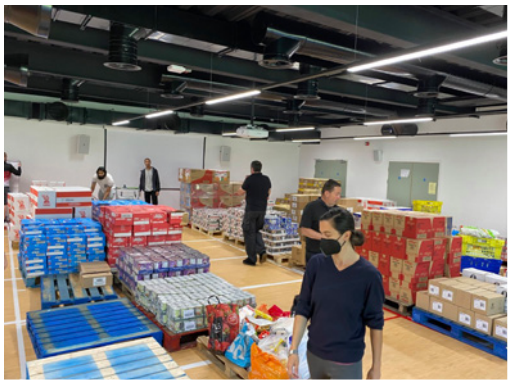
Listen to all the episodes on Spotify

Professor Mark Hart, Deputy Director of Enterprise Research Centre (ERC) has gained noteworthy coverage on the COVID-19 SEM research.

The below SMEs, who have taken part in Aston's centre of excellence in research and practice on servitization and **advanced services** have stepped up to provide equipment, parts and services for the fight against the current pandemic, and improve their responsiveness to customers, approach to innovation and understanding of advanced services:

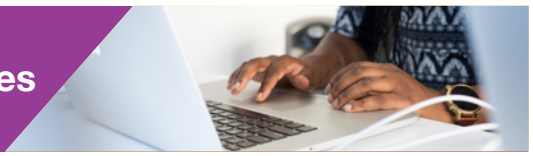
> **Evac+Chair International** - provide a flexible adaption kit to convert standard ambulance stretchers into medium-dependency critical-care stretchers. It was Developed in a matter of weeks and is being supplied for the transportation of critically ill patients between the Nightingale hospital and London hospitals.
> **Central Scanning** - 3D printing of PPE visors and specifically purchased injection moulding capabilities to manufacture visors at scale.
> **CHH CoNeX** - sourcing and distributing PPE equipment.
> **AE Aerospace** - producing ventilator components.
> **UV Light** - supplying UV disinfection equipment to prevent the spread of infections.

Aston Student Union is also supporting the local community in partnership with FareShare Midlands, The Real Junk Food Project and The Active Wellbeing Society to provide food to the local community. See full story **here**.



Aston Student Union foodbank

Innovative research, online webinars and resources



Professor Frank Austermuehl of LSS Translation Studies has offered to provide advice for SMEs encountering language barriers in dealing remotely with clients, offering guidance on remote interpreting, smart use of machine translation and sourcing of translation services.

Professor Vladlena Benson of Operations and Information Management department, presented at the Budget Briefing in Westminster hosted by Andrew Griffith MP. The insights into the budget and the direction of the Government, provided by Mr Griffith, focused on supporting the economy and tackling the crisis through technology-based means.

Dr Soumyadeb Chowdhury, Dr Ahmad Beltagui and Dr Oscar Rodriguez-Espindola of Operations and Information Management department published an article in 'The Conversation' on how Artificial Intelligence, 3D printing and blockchain can overcome supply problems in a crisis. It recommends integrating these technologies and considers the effect on supplies of ventilators, hand sanitiser and pasta.

Professor Mark Hart, Dr Neha Prashar and Dr Anastasia Ri have provided an analysis of failing businesses in March as a result of COVID-19. Read this article by the FT.

Dr. Tom Mills of Sociology and Policy department, has written a major comment piece in the Guardian on the BBC's response to the coronavirus. Read the article **here**.

Abhilash Nair from Aston School of Law has written an interesting blog post looking at the COVID-19 lockdown from a legal perspective. Read the blog **here**.

Dr Uwe Napiersky of Work & Organisational Psychology department, has delivered a lunchtime webinar to the Future Faces division of the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce on the subject of managing team dynamics during the current crisis.

Patrycja Rozbicka, of Politics and International Relations department has written a report on 'The UK Live Music Industry in a post-2019 era: A Globalised local perspective' referenced in a Forbes article, discussing the impact of Brexit and Covid-19 on the music industry.

Davide Vampa of Politics and International Relations department has written a short blog post (published by Democratic Audit) on how COVID-19 is impacting on the territorial dimension of politics and how it might reshape relations between central and regional/local governments.

If you wish to find out more on the above initiatives or discuss some specific projects in detail, do not hesitate to contact ABS PRME Director, Nathalie Ormrod at n.ormrod@aston.ac.uk

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Appendix

APPENDIX 1

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