

Green Impact Students' Unions

Frequently Asked Questions

2024-25

green impact



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM

nus *charity*
national union of **students**

GISU 2024-25

Frequently Asked Questions

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Key Dates

- 27th August 2024: Toolkit launched
- 2nd October 2024, 3pm: Intro to GISU welcome webinar
- 28th October - 17th November 2024: SOS-UK's annual [Sustainability Skills survey](#) is open
- 3rd December 2024, 10am - 4pm: GISU contacts virtual skills & networking day
- Student Sustainability Summit (Date TBC)
- w/c 10th February: Midway 'check-in' calls
- March 2024: SOS-UK's National [SDG Teach In](#)
- **4th April 2025, 5pm: Toolkit submission deadline**
- April/May: Audits
- June: Awards confirmed and presented

How do we access the toolkit?

After sign-up, you will receive registration details for the toolkit. Multiple people from your SU/SA can register on the toolkit and join your team. There is [a toolkit user guide linked on the resource bank](#) if you need any help using the system.

Have any criteria changed this year?

Yes! After taking on your feedback, you will notice the following changes:

- There is no longer a Campaigning & Influencing section. Instead, you can submit any campaigns *not* covered by other actions in the toolkit in the Self-Defined criteria (SC001-SC004). We have added an additional Self-Defined criteria so you can submit up to four actions that you have completed that are not adequately covered elsewhere in the toolkit.
- We have removed the Outcomes section, and replaced it with a single action, which is a reflective exercise on your outcomes (LD006)
- We have moved the decolonising and decarbonising action into Thematic Projects (TH011) and increased the number of Thematic Projects you can complete to 7 (from 5 in 2023-24).
- We have added new SU Operations actions on a variety of operational areas of sustainability (SU007-SU009)
- We have added a new action to submit a case study of your work to share good practice and learnings with other unions/associations (OC003)

What are the scoring thresholds?

Each action is worth points when you complete it, and your final points total will determine your award level.

There are two scoring thresholds, to enable small, specialist and FE SUs or SAs to be accredited at a level in line with their resources. Small and specialist or FE organisations will be defined as those with:

- Block grant under £400,000

- No commercial activity (shops, bars, catering outlets)
- Fewer than 15 FTE staff (excluding elected officers)

It will be assumed that your organisation is not small/specialist or FE, so if you feel that you fall into that category, please email gisu@sos-uk.org with evidence.

Scoring thresholds:

Award level	Small, Specialist or FE Unions/Associations	All other Unions/Associations
Working Towards	79 points or fewer	94 points or fewer
Good	80 - 219 points	95 - 239 points
Very Good	220 - 279 points	240 - 299 points
Excellent	280 or more points	300 or more points

Across the whole toolkit, we want you to be ambitious and think creatively about how you can change and influence your campus(es) to be more sustainable, no matter what size you are. The scaled scoring model for each criterion will also enable you to gain points for trying to make progress in areas where you doesn't have full ownership or responsibility.

Please note, when you mark an action as 'done' on the toolkit it will display full points awarded for that action until your audit. Your audit will determine where on the scoring scale you actually fall for each action, so your score will likely go down from full points. Please review the scoring guidance for each action to understand where you are likely to fall on the scale.

What awards are available this year?

Every SU/SA that submits their toolkit and undertakes the audit process will receive a *Working Towards*, *Good*, *Very Good* or *Excellent* award, as detailed above.

In addition to this, there **are five** national awards that will be presented at the end of the year:

- Overall Winner: highest score
- Nations Award: highest scoring SU/SA in the Nations
- Most Improved: biggest change in score from 2023-24
- Highest Scoring (FE): highest scoring SU/SA from further education
- Student Leadership in Sustainability: nominations will be taken on the toolkit and winners will be judged by a panel

You will receive digital assets to demonstrate your award level, or you can purchase a sustainable wooden award trophy to physically display your achievements. If you would like a physical award **and did not request it when you signed up**, please email gisu@sos-uk.org. **The awards cost £30 +VAT.**

Please note, if you have signed up to the 'toolkit only' membership, you will not receive an audit or award. Please let us know as soon as possible if you would like to add an audit to your membership, or if you would like to upgrade your online audit to an in-person audit: gisu@sos-uk.org.

Are there any mandatory criteria?

There are no mandatory criteria this year, which we hope will support your team to achieve the award you deserve. You can work through the actions in any order, based on your priorities and resources.

Why do I need to Self-Assess my score for each action?

Your team should state what score you think you should get for each action, up to the maximum available points, and we validate it compared to others as part of a moderation process post-audit. Your auditor will see the points that you expect to receive and can use this to inform the audit discussion, so it is important to score yourself as accurately as possible for a more efficient audit.

We do not expect all SUs/SAs to achieve the maximum score for each action.

How do I estimate my score for each criterion?

You will find the scoring guidance in the 'How you will be audited' section of the toolkit on each action. On the comments and evidence tab of each action there is a box that says 'Self-Assessment Score'. Simply add your Self-Assessment score in that box, and press save.

We will consider the size and capacity of the team when awarding points in the audit and will expect to see progress year on year to maintain the points you have achieved previously.

What evidence do I need to provide?

Each action will be accompanied by a description of the evidence we expect to see, including the process for you to present it to us. Please upload the most relevant documents you feel necessary (3 per criteria or less) and supplement your evidence with comments in the comments box to give further context to your auditor. Should the auditor require more evidence this will be requested within the audit period and will not impact your final accreditation.

Please be mindful of our digital footprint when uploading evidence by not uploading large files, videos, or multiple high resolution photos. If required, you can link to further information that is saved elsewhere online if you need.

Can we include things we did last academic year?

As a general rule, we would want to see evidence that things have happened **this academic year**. However, some criteria may have been completed in previous years, if the activity you are claiming as evidence started before the current academic year, please state this in the evidence box for that criteria and show how you have improved on this area this year. To retain or improve on your accreditation year to year, we'll be predominately judging what you have done this academic year.

Why do some criteria relate to what the institution is doing?

There are a number of actions which directly or indirectly relate to what the institution is doing in relation to sustainability. For instance, the inclusion of sustainability in the institution's main strategy could be significantly transformative; as such we hope that you will try and engage and influence the institution on this subject whenever the opportunity arises. This may take several years, but we will award you points relative to the progress made each year.

Other actions such as reducing utilities may be indirectly related to your institution as they house the energy monitoring system, enabling you to measure the impact of any changes you make. For actions like this, we expect you to collaborate with your institution, being proactive and lobbying them for facilities or information to help you become more sustainable.

What do we need to do for the self-defined criteria?

This is your opportunity to share any other initiatives or work you feel haven't already covered elsewhere in the toolkit. One of the four actions is to showcase an 'innovative intervention' that you feel is a new approach to promoting sustainability on campus. The remaining three self-defined actions can be any other activity you feel deserves recognition.

As we have removed the Campaigning and Influencing section on your key campaign for 2024-25, you could use the Self-Defined criteria to gain points for a key campaign (if this is not covered adequately elsewhere in the toolkit).

What support is available?

- [The GISU Resource Bank](#) - this is where you'll find guidance documents, templates, case studies and webinar recordings
- **Join us on Workplace** - join in discussions, share ideas or ask questions by joining the ['NUS Sustainability, Ethics & Climate Action' Facebook Workplace page](#).
- **Newsletters** - [sign up to our monthly SOS-UK newsletter](#), which includes housing updates for Students' Unions as well as other sustainability articles.
- **Mid-project calls** - Early in 2025 we will offer calls for all participating SUs to check-in with your progress, offer support and to gather your feedback.
- **Webinars** - we coordinate webinars on a range of themes to facilitate idea sharing and inspire action.
- **Peer to Peer** - We have a great network of sustainability contacts, help partner SUs and support or facilitate online forum calls.
- **Training & Networking** - if you'd like more tailored on-site or remote training for your staff, Officers or students, you can request to purchase this when signing up for GISU or get in contact with us.
- **Learning and development opportunities** - SUs participating in GISU will receive a 10% reduction in price to some [SOS-UK's Learning Academy offerings](#). Offerings particularly relevant for SUs include the Course reps & sustainability training and Campaign planning workshops.
- **Ad hoc support** - please reach out to us if you're having trouble with the toolkit or need help with ideas - gisu@sos-uk.org.

How will the audits work?

When you have submitted your toolkit, a member of SOS-UK will be assigned as your auditor in April/May 2025. They will read through your toolkit in its entirety, looking at the comments and evidence you have uploaded, and give you a score using the scoring guidance provided. You will then be asked to have an audit call with your auditor (or an in-person meeting, if you selected this when signing up), where they will go through any criteria where it seems that the score you have yourself doesn't match the evidence provided. It is important that you upload thorough comments and evidence wherever possible *prior* to submitting your toolkit- if you run out of time in the audit, the remaining criteria will be scored based on the evidence you have uploaded only.

At the end of the audit your auditor will let you know rough timescales for when you will hear about your award level.

Please note, if you have signed up to the 'toolkit only' membership, you will not receive an audit or award. Please let us know as soon as possible if you would like to add an audit to your membership, or if you would like to upgrade your online audit to an in-person audit: gisu@sos-uk.org.

Full information on the audit process will be shared closer to the submission deadline.

How do I stay up-to-date with GISU this year?

We will send all updates out via email to the three named individuals on your sign-up form, so please contact us if you would like to add more people to email distributions. We also have a Microsoft Team where updates will be posted and you can network with other SUs/SAs.

You may pick up on additional sustainability opportunities via the ['NUS Sustainability, Ethics & Climate Action' Facebook Workplace page](#). For any other queries, please get in touch with us on gisu@sos-uk.org.