



Strategy paper  
**The will, the ability, and the  
action - for sustainability**  
at the HWR Berlin



# 1. HWR Berlin takes responsibility for the future

## 1.1. Context: Why must HWR Berlin espouse sustainability?

Sustainability in the sense of “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and choose their own lifestyles”<sup>1</sup> is a complex task that is critical for the future. Universities can play an important role in dealing with this task by equipping students with the skills they need to think and act responsibly and with an eye to the future.

HWR Berlin acknowledges its social responsibility in its guiding principle. In accordance with this, the university commits itself to the United Nations Sustainability Goals in its structural and development plan for 2019-2022. Studies and teaching contribute to making global development socially, ecologically and economically sustainable. HWR Berlin achieves this within the framework of several specialised degree programmes. In addition, there are thematically relevant specialisations or subject modules in a growing number of degree programmes as well as offerings in the General Studies.

Research activities dealing with environmental, climate and sustainability aspects are primarily located in the Institute for Sustainability (INa). Third-party funds have been obtained in recent years, particularly for research on aspects of climate neutrality/sustainability of buildings, neighbourhoods and companies.

In the current structural and development plan, HWR Berlin claims a “pioneering role in sustainability issues”. The university can only fulfil this claim if it initiates substantive-strategic developments that lead to a deep, comprehensive and lasting engagement with sustainability and if it participates in the implementation of sustainability goals at the academic as well as socio-political level. Thus, it also responds to external demands and expectations. It is apparent that with the upcoming reform of the Legal Advice Aid Act (BerHG), the task of universities to contribute to the preservation and improvement of living and environmental conditions will be refined by research and teaching, and universities will be required to adopt a sustainability concept.

## 1.2. Vision: The thoughts and actions of the members of the university are oriented towards sustainability goals

HWR Berlin assumes responsibility for a sustainable and thus future-oriented and -empowering development of society. It creates essential foundations by imparting the necessary knowledge and skills in teaching and studies as well as in further training services.

The university generates knowledge and innovative ability to shape sustainable transformative processes by means of research and transfer. By equipping future decision-makers with the necessary skills, it strengthens the structural basis for the success of this social task.

Through active membership in networks and associations, HWR Berlin positions itself as a university with a strong commitment to sustainability goals.

Imparting technical knowledge and methodological skills are necessary but not sufficient prerequisites for the contribution of the university to the profound changes in the extraction and use of resources, in the economy and in the social sphere. The sense of responsibility towards nature and society must be strengthened and become a guide for studies, teaching and research, as well as for the governance and operation of the university. “The ability” necessitates an ethical intent, i.e. “The will”. However, experiencing effectiveness in the sense of successful conversion of acquired skills into individual and collective action is also necessary. “The ability” comes in handy and proves its worth immediately when it comes to “The action”. Therefore, HWR Berlin creates and uses opportunities to make it possible to experience and prove the transformative effect of convictions and skills.

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<sup>1</sup> UN World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) 1987

This strategy paper is essentially based on the results of a working group in which designated members of all status groups have collaborated. The working group met three times between February and April 2021. This productive and participatory process is documented in a work report that goes beyond the present strategy paper in many respects.

## 2. Areas of action and objectives

HWR Berlin sees sustainability as a comprehensive topic, which challenges the university as a whole. This requires a structured approach.<sup>2</sup> Fields are identified hereafter, which are suitable for the substantive and strategic development of sustainability at HWR Berlin and development goals are named for these areas of action. Starting points for measures, which can be expected to have a good leverage effect, are shown as examples in each case.

### 1. Area of action - Education

*HWR Berlin has a portfolio of prestigious and in-demand degree programmes and certificates with focus on sustainability.*

Strengthening the training services for activities with a close link to sustainability can be achieved particularly by establishing and expanding degree programmes with a corresponding focus. Certificate services can establish education for sustainable development in the catalogue of topics for lifelong learning.

*Students at HWR Berlin deal with aspects of ecological, economic and social responsibility in their studies. Corresponding specialisations and focuses are offered where possible.*

The implementation of sustainability as a visible cross-sectoral theme in all degree programmes includes the teaching of subject-specific knowledge as well as orientation knowledge. The students thus develop the ability to analyse, evaluate and solve ecological, social, economic and legal questions and problems in terms of sustainability.

*Students at HWR Berlin will find a broad and attractive extracurricular offer on topics of ecological, economic and social responsibility.*

Corresponding offers can already be found in the General Studies. Supplements - for example in the form of interdisciplinary action weeks - are likely to pique the interest, especially among first-year students in the orientation phase, and strengthen motivation to deal with sustainability-related content in their respective degree programmes.

### 2. Area of action - Research

*Research on sustainability is efficient and firmly anchored at HWR Berlin.*

An academic environment in which research on sustainability thrives and junior researchers are qualified in an interdisciplinary manner is a project of the entire university. Internal and affiliated institutes of HWR Berlin - first and foremost the INa - can play an active and activating role.

Incentives such as the granting of WiMi positions can contribute to the development and entrenchment of Sustainability Science at HWR Berlin.

### 3. Area of action - Transfer

*HWR Berlin is a recognised and sought-after transfer partner for sustainability-related topics and tasks.*

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission e.V., 2011: Universities for sustainable development. Sustainability in research, teaching and business, Bonn.

For this objective, sustainability needs to be highly visible in the transfer strategy of the university, which is to be developed. Transfer in the context of sustainability includes knowledge and innovative know-how as well as the accompanying support of companies, authorities and other social institutions in their respective transformation processes. Transfer formats that promote student participation support the educational goal of the university. Application-oriented transfer requires communication and exchange with external cooperation partners. Alumni can play a key role here.

#### **4. Area of action - social responsibility and sustainability-related engagement in the university environment**

*HWR assumes ecological, economic and social responsibility. It is a recognised participant and sought-after cooperation partner in achieving sustainability goals.*

A good starting point is the reliable and - where possible - innovative implementation of external requirements, such as the conclusion of a climate agreement. Over and above that, the university can make voluntary commitments to promote or practise ecological, social and economic sustainability, for example by signing relevant declarations. Low-threshold services in the form of lectures, workshops and consultations on sustainability-related topics for citizens or networking with initiatives to strengthen ecological, social and economic sustainability are also evidence of the assumption of social responsibility.

#### **5. Area of action - profile building and communication**

*Sustainability is a credible and perceived profile element of HWR Berlin.*

The external and internal perception of HWR Berlin as an institution that contributes to sustainable economic, social and ecological development should be reinforced by targeted communication measures. However, these require a suitable object such as activities of the student body “around” the topic of sustainability, accolades of members of HWR Berlin for achievements that contribute to sustainability in a special way, the presentation of sustainability reports or the resolution of a sustainability-oriented Code of Conduct.

#### **6. Area of action - university operations**

*HWR Berlin is guided by sustainability goals when making decisions that affect the operation of the university. Operations are organised in such a way that negative impacts are kept to a minimum.*

Within the scope of its options, the university tests and develops sustainable approaches and models in building and campus planning and development. At the operational level, opportunities to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are utilised consistently. This includes the use of modern facility management technology, the promotion of sustainable mobility and sustainability-oriented procurement management. The introduction of an environmental management system can support the systematisation of operative measures.

#### **7. Area of action - university governance**

*The control and regulation system of HWR Berlin is oriented towards sustainability goals. It is evaluated regularly with respect to its performance.*

HWR Berlin will be better able to achieve a “pioneering role in sustainability issues” with the help of a control and regulation system that supports structured, comprehensible and, in parts, measurable development. Considering the complexity of the task, it also seems necessary to introduce a corresponding management system or certification. The committees of the university will deal with this issue increasingly in the course of adopting and implementing a sustainability strategy. Also, it makes sense to create innovative formats in order to pool the expertise available at the university in all status groups and make it productive, as well as to articulate stakeholder interests and involve them in productive exchange.

## 8. Area of action - student participation and campus life

*The students of HWR Berlin are independent actors and partners in anchoring sustainability in teaching, research, transfer and administration.*

The aim must be to continuously involve students in the broad spectrum of areas of action relevant to sustainable development. The adoption of tried and tested institution-wide approaches at other universities, such as the Green Office model, should be considered.

*HWR campuses are places of learning and experience for sustainability, which are co-designed by the students.*

This can be achieved particularly through the active participation of students in designing and developing the locations. Student projects such as Uni Gardening are supported by the university and contribute towards the university members and the university's neighbourhood being able to experience sustainability directly.

## 9. Area of action - Internationality

*HWR Berlin sees sustainability as a global and unifying task. Sustainability is of great significance in partnerships and cooperations.*

Since education for sustainable development requires international orientation and organisation, sustainability and internationality should be thought of jointly. With its large network of international partnerships, HWR Berlin has a global infrastructure that it can use for the tasks of sustainable development.<sup>3</sup> It is important, in particular, to develop sustainability as a thematic core for cooperation and exchange relationships.

## 10. Area of action - Digitisation

*HWR Berlin examines and evaluates possibilities of digitisation with regard to its social, ecological and economic effects. Digitisation measures with a positive sustainability impact are prioritised.*

For operations of a university, digitisation opens up considerable sustainability potentials that need to be developed. In particular, digitisation can contribute to a reduction in paper consumption, climate-damaging physical mobility and the space requirements of the university.<sup>4</sup> Digitisation is based on a powerful IT infrastructure, which in turn must be examined for opportunities to save energy and streamline technology.

# 3. Where does HWR Berlin stand?

The path to the aforementioned strategic-content goals begins with determining the positioning. The strengths and weaknesses of HWR Berlin as well as key environmental factors are outlined and strategic options are formulated hereafter.

## 3.1. Strengths

**HWR Berlin has a strong core of proven sustainability expertise in the areas of teaching and learning, research, transfer and governance.** These are “explicit” resources that can be built upon or linked to. The following stand out here

- proven and sought-after study programmes with focus on sustainability,
- approaches to the integration of sustainability, especially in the curricula of business administration degree programmes,

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<sup>3</sup> Insert link to internationalisation paper as hyperlink

<sup>4</sup> Insert link to Digitisation paper as hyperlink

- professors with a (sub)denomination of sustainability or many years of teaching and research experience on sustainability topics,
- an established and active internal institute for sustainability,
- third-party funded projects on sustainability topics - to a considerable extent with an application orientation and great transfer potential,
- Experience in sustainability reporting.

The existing framework conditions at the university are conducive to the consolidation, strengthening and strategic orientation of sustainability in the key tasks and fields of employment of the university.

- The subject profile of the university is well suited to taking up sustainability in its social, economic, ecological as well as legal dimensions - thus "completely" - and establishing it as a comprehensive topic.
- A large number of professors, academic staff and employees from technology and administration have teaching, research and management experience related to sustainability, as well as a high degree of self-motivation to strengthen sustainability and responsibility at the university. These are a valuable resource for the strategic development of sustainability at HWR Berlin.
- Sustainability goals have great significance for the students of the university across all departments and degree programmes. Strong personal issues, especially in the area of ecological sustainability/climate protection, can motivate to also deal intensively with social, legal and economic aspects of sustainability during their studies and with regard to the expectations and requirements of their chosen professional field.
- Sustainability has great significance in the extra-curricular services offered by the university. Courses in the General Studies, sustainability days and discussion events in a wide variety of formats show that sustainability-related topics at HWR Berlin can be dealt with in an interdisciplinary manner spanning degree programmes, with great success.

The university is networked locally, nationally and internationally and is involved in lively cooperation and exchange relationships. As a topic spanning space, institutions and sectors, it can be strategically placed in these partnerships. This way, effects can be achieved in these cooperation and exchange relationships, as well as reinforcement effects in the university. The following unique selling points (USPs) of HWR Berlin can be used as a starting point here:

- a wide range of dual and internal degree programmes with conceptually designed and operationally practised intensive cooperation formats with companies and authorities,
- a very pronounced internationality of all status groups,<sup>5</sup>
- internships or practical phases integrated into the education in all Bachelor's degree programmes,
- institutionalised exchange formats between universities and professional as well as academic environment in the form of advisory boards, training commissions and similar committees,
- an active business incubation centre, which supports the transfer of innovative ideas to start-ups, but also to existing companies, authorities and NGOs, whereby start-up activities are significantly characterised by social start-ups and in particular start-ups focusing on sustainability.

### 3.2. Weaknesses

Sustainability in teaching, research, transfer and governance has not received systematic and continuous attention in recent years. In an environment where sustainability has gained much significance, this can be seen as a relative weakness of the university.

- Sustainability has not yet played an important role in the strategic development planning of the university. HWR Berlin has not made a stable commitment to sustainability objectives. This is

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<sup>5</sup> Insert link to internationalisation paper as hyperlink

accompanied by a lack of “deep” anchoring of the topic in the university. This is underlined by the fact that sustainability was and is not a constant in the governance of the university. There have been no real initiatives to expand degree programmes with a focus on sustainability or research on sustainability topics at the university level.

### 3.3. Opportunities

Highly effective external developments open up opportunities for the consolidation, reinforcement and strategic orientation of sustainability at the university. Increased and increasing expectations and demands on the university should be mentioned here, which can have a galvanising and stimulating effect. In addition, there are extended and stable funding lines at the national and European level. The following are worth mentioning here:

- the expectation of students that the university will seriously and appropriately address their personal concerns and issues, especially with regard to global climate change, and that it will “deal with them” in a professional manner, especially in thematically relevant courses,
- academic and socio-political requirements, which are reflected, for example, in the direction of the pending reform of the BerlHG (Berlin Higher Education Act), the guidelines on quality assurance of degree programmes, the obligation of the university to conclude a climate protection agreement or paying greater attention to sustainability in the mobility programmes (Green Erasmus),<sup>6</sup>
- the growing awareness of the requirements for sustainable action among cooperation partners from business and public administration, which enables greater curricular attention to sustainability.
- Scope for shaping and developing sustainability at the university also arises from the readiness and increasing demand of external partners to place sustainability more prominently in existing cooperative relationships, which can trigger impulses for research and transfer activities at the university.

The utilisation of opportunities that open up requires a suitable internal set-up of the university that goes beyond the support of comprehensive teaching, research, transfer and practice projects. Here, the communicative highlighting of successful sustainability activities and the creation of “Sustainability beacons” should be taken into consideration. This can create a ripple effect and set a broader dynamic in the university in motion.

### 3.4. Risks

Risks for the consolidation, reinforcement and strategic orientation of sustainability at HWR Berlin result particularly from a “half-hearted” commitment on the part of the participants at the university and - related to this - from a low level of progress in development with simultaneously increasing external expectations. Damage would be particularly likely if

- the inclination towards sustainability objectives came under suspicion of opportunism,
- other strategic objectives permanently overshadowed sustainability,
- the resources required for sustainable university operations would not be available or would not be provided, thereby making credible sustainability practices impossible,
- Developmental gaps related to universities would occur in the reference system of HWR Berlin and have a demotivating effect.

### 3.5. Strategic approaches to utilising existing strengths

At the beginning of the series of steps is a structural reinforcement of sustainability at HWR Berlin. Starting points are the stronger consideration of sustainability and related goals in structural and development planning and in corresponding decisions of the university. Here, the great interest in

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<sup>6</sup> Insert link to internationalisation paper as hyperlink

sustainability across status groups can be used to shape these development and decision-making processes in a participative manner.

Targeted strengthening and expansion of the existing fields of competence in the area of teaching and studies can take place in parallel. This includes the consistent entrenchment of sustainability-related topics in the university's training programmes, insofar as these result from the current and future requirements of the respective professional fields. The existing quality management tools and procedures can make an important contribution here. The areas of research and transfer require special attention:

- In order to establish "Sustainability Science" at HWR Berlin, targeted use of existing programmes and emerging funding priorities<sup>7</sup> must be sought. In doing so, the university can benefit from its existing skills in the acquisition of third-party funding.
- In the application policy for acquiring third-party funding, existing professional and organisational strengths should be taken into account. Thus, there are good prerequisites at FB 1 to establish economic environmental assessment as a focus with high funding potential. The same applies to the research field of socio-ecological transformation of societies. At research field 2, it is expedient to use the topics of sustainable tourism, sustainable energy supply and climate neutrality/sustainability in the management of buildings, neighbourhoods and value chains as development cores.

The visibility of these activities and developments is increased to achieve secondary effects.

- Continuous internal communication can strengthen the identification of the university with the topic of sustainability.
- In its external communication, HWR Berlin is presented as a university with a special competence profile in sustainability. A corresponding image promotes external demand for relevant cooperation in academic training, research and transfer.

The existing networks and cooperative relationships are used to increase the impact in transfer of sustainability. This can be supported by a stronger connection between sustainability and entrepreneurship, for example through the targeted involvement of the business incubation centre at HWR.

### **3.6. Strategic approaches to compensate for existing weaknesses**

The starting point is the consideration that the university shows a symbolic presence in thematic areas and areas of action into which it must first grow to its full extent. This is based on the expectation that such "planting the flag" will have a galvanising and steering effect. Possible starting points are

- a strong and visible programmatic commitment to sustainability goals, for example in a revised guiding principle of the university or its structural and development plans,
- reinforcement of the credibility of this commitment through appropriate certification, the monitoring of sustainability activities at the university and the regular preparation and publication of a sustainability report,
- entering into strategic partnerships and cooperations with other universities, relevant institutes and NGOs,
- Consultations with recognised external experts as part of an advisory process integrated into the university,
- the creation of core competence with a "radiating effect" into the university.

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<sup>7</sup> Particular mention should be made of the FONA (Research for Sustainability) funding line of the BMBF. Sustainability issues are prominent in the EU Research Framework Programme, which is reflected in the thematic design of the current and upcoming funding programmes.



## 4. Sustainability at HWR Berlin succeeds in a participative process

The substantive and strategic further development of sustainability at HWR Berlin this is a complex task that is critical for the future and requires a holistic approach and a high degree of participation. In the process, this will without doubt require setting areas of focus and prioritisation. Against the backdrop of the importance of the desired substantive-strategic strengthening of sustainability, however, neglecting individual areas of action must be avoided, as this would be tantamount to marginalising the interests, expectations and also the potentials of individual participants and groups.

Continuous professional monitoring and support of the further strategy process as well as subsequent implementation would be beneficial. It would be worth considering the establishment of a sustainability commission by the Academic Senate of the HWR Berlin. The solutions at other universities should also be taken into consideration, insofar as they are suitable to have an effect on the university and to initiate the discussion on future global, social and ecological issues related to teaching and studies, in research and transfer, and also in the university administration, as well as to support the implementation of concrete measures.

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