

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL BOTANIC GARDEN STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028 (Version 1 for 23/24)

Background: Founded in 1882 the Botanic Garden is a c.2 ha site located in North Bristol Student village about 2 km from the Clifton Campus. It is highly integrated into the University community and has a special relationship with the School of Biological Sciences, where it's used by academics and students to support teaching, research and engagement.

The Botanic Garden is one of the University's key points of contact with the general public with c.25-30,000 visits per year, a Friends of the Botanic Garden group with c.2500 members from 1700 households, and an active community of 120 volunteers; the latter were the recipient of the prestigious 'Queen's Award for Voluntary Service' in 2018 awarded for '*Providing support for the work, development and educational activity of the University of Bristol Botanic Garden*'. Income generated from the combined Botanic activities (including RHS courses) is £295k per annum, which is further supported by an operational budget (allocated via the Campus Division) of £195k (as of 2022/23).

The aims of the Botanic Garden are:

1. To provide plants, advice and assistance for teaching and research within the University of Bristol.
2. To be accessible to students, educational and scientific organisations, and the general public.
3. To educate in multiple domains, for example, showcasing our dependency on the continued survival of the world's plants for food, medicine, shelter, clothes, art and culture.
4. To continue to support the Friends and Volunteer's, recognising our volunteer's fantastic work and contribution to the day-to-day operation and development of the Botanic Garden

These aims are underpinned by the goal of working towards reducing the reliance on university funding by diversifying the offer and capitalising on commercial opportunities through the business plan.

Alignment with the University Strategy:

The Botanic Garden aligns with the University Pillars as follows:

Pillar 1: World-leading research and innovation with local, national and global impact

Provide a plant collection for use in disciplinary and interdisciplinary research by our staff and students, our partners and others. The collection is accessible, accurate, relevant and focussed on four core plant collections: Evolution collection, Mediterranean plants (species from Europe, North Africa, South Africa, Australia, Chile and California), Local and rare native plants and Useful plants.

Pillar 2: An inspiring education and transformative student experience

Encourage access for all students to our contemporary Botanic Garden, designed and planted to inspire teaching, research and discussion about plants for all students. Work with all University departments, student groups and the Students Union to initiate, create and deliver student-centred activities, learning and experiences.

Pillar 3: Transformative power of the global and civic university

Facilitate learning, science, and research about; biology, plants and the environment to local, regional and national communities through; public engagement festivals, lifelong learning course programmes, events, tours and activities, and Friends' membership, where engagement between scientists and the public can take place.

The Botanic Garden aligns with the University Enablers as described below:Enabler 1: Inspiring and supporting our people.

To inspire our students, staff and visitors to the Botanic Garden. Proactively engage with our University communities to promote the Botanic Garden as an institutional resource for their studies and research and a peaceful and safe space to aid student and staff wellbeing through joint initiatives with support teams and staff. Work with our supporting charity the Friends of University of Bristol Botanic Garden so they continue to provide support both volunteer assistance and financial help for the running, development and educational work of the Botanic Garden.

Enabler 2 Creating a worldclass campus

86% of the top fifty Universities worldwide have a Botanic Garden or are in a city with one; they are an internationally recognized marker of success. We will ensure that University of Bristol Botanic Garden plays a role in the creation of a worldclass campus.

Enabler 3: Investing in our future

We are investing in a sustainable future by investing in plant collections, people, teaching, conservation, and community engagement, within both the university and the city of Bristol. Work with civic partners like 'Visit Bristol' and International tourist market to engage with visitor markets to the city, increase visitor numbers, visitor spread across the year and develop potential commercial opportunities.

The Botanic Garden aligns with the Cross-cutting themes as follows:Cross-cutting theme 1: Developing internationalisation and global engagement

The University Botanic Garden is highly networked internationally, through organisations as Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) with whom we have helped formulate the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation thereby raising the profile of the University of Bristol in professional networks around the world. It is part of a global community of 3400 Botanic Gardens committed to securing plant diversity for the well-being of people and the planet.

Cross-cutting theme 2: Embedding sustainability.

Leading the way with sustainable horticultural practices, for example growing flowering meadows rather than mowing lawns, keeping pesticides to a minimum, recycling the food waste as compost from the café on site and installing composting toilets for visitors, storing rainwater, we embed sustainability in our working practices and set an example to students' staff and the general public.

Cross-cutting theme 3: Equality, diversity and inclusion

Working with students, staff and volunteers the Botanic Gardens provides a safe, diverse, and inclusive space through infrastructure, behaviour, interpretation, and events.

Strategic priorities of the Botanic Gardens 2023-2028

1. Build stronger collaboration with the 'Venues and Events' team to maximise commercial and marketing activities. This will diversify and increase income from activities held at the Botanic Garden. Grow commercial income by becoming more attractive destination for visitors to Bristol by capitalising from the growing national and international tourist markets. Continue to work with marketing organisations that jointly promote visits to Bristol.
2. Create a business case to reduce the reliance on the core investment. The business case will set out the plan to grow visitor numbers by attracting new people to our lifelong learning course programmes,

festivals (e.g. sculpture festival with c. 4000 visitors and pollination festival with c. 3000 visitors) and garden tours with and activities.c.2500 pa. Working to offer joint access initiatives to University's other historic gardens by increasing our visibility within the City through joint initiatives with the Bristol tourist office, increasing our digital presence, local community newsletters, participating in open doors days, community events and increasing tourist brown signs with the aim to increase visitors by 5% p.a. over the next five years (7,500 visitors).

3. Continue to support and increase research projects carried out at the Botanic Garden by University of Bristol and wider academic institutions. Ensure that UoB initiated research grants are hosted at Bristol Botanic Gardens (when appropriate) and grow our network of academic contacts so that the value of our Botanic Collections is recognised across academia, NGO's and industry.
4. Collaborate with The University Audit Process in 2023 to enable clarity over Governance, reporting lines and implement actions arising from the Audit.
5. Increase and develop further links with the horticultural industry to offer theory and practical training to staff, apprentices, to strengthen the horticultural sector and offer CPD courses for staff and volunteers to make our community more robust and able to adapt to the challenges that lay ahead by making partnerships with relevant organisation (Soil Association, Institute of Ecology). Develop our Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) teaching and learning facilities to offer Level two and Level three (practical and theory), following the new RHS syllabus from 2024, to build on our existing programme of teaching.
6. Once the activity portfolio and increased visitor numbers has been realised, we will then be able to demonstrate the need for a 'Cultural welcome Centre'. It is hoped that investment could create a meeting, teaching and discussion space for staff groups working together with our students and a central location for Botanic Garden administrative public facing staff enabling the engagement with the public to be more efficient. Its location next to the new award-winning Guangzhou Garden will create an imaginative, creative space available for staff and students throughout the year. It also provides a marketable space for external corporate groups.
7. We will continue to work with Resilife and Students Union to increase the number of students taking part in our initiatives through workshops (onsite and in Halls), tours and increasing student volunteering at the Botanic Garden. Mental health issues are a serious problem for a significant proportion of our undergraduates and there is a substantial body of work showing that time spent in a greenspace has significant beneficial effects. The Botanic Garden is in the North Bristol Student village, home to 2406 undergraduates and there is a very real opportunity to be a part of the solution to improved mental health.
8. Provide a small quarantine glasshouse (4m x 3m) away from existing glasshouse complex, whereby we can receive plant importations to the University from outside the UK and hold these while we complete DEFRA inspections and administration processes before plants are released to research teams and the Botanic Garden.
9. Continue to improve infrastructure to build towards a fully inclusive experience for all, for example, wheelchair friendly paths, doorways, and audio tours.
10. Review sustainable ways to reduce the impact of the Botanic Garden on the environment for example, water and energy saving innovations.

Example activities to demonstrate the horticultural and conservation importance of the Botanic Garden on the local and global stage.

1) The Botanic Garden has worked with Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project partners; Bristol City Council, Natural England and Bristol Zoological Gardens to help establish a sister colony of the endangered Honewort *Trinia glauca* plant in the Gully. This project has been led by the team at the Botanic Garden who have grown hundreds of new plants over ten years to plant a new colony in the Gully. This will support the existing dwindling population and bring the colony up to a sustainable level and provide a biodiversity net gain.

Ongoing monitoring onsite and a population in the Botanic Garden will ensure the future of this rare native plant and contribute towards the UK target in the Global Strategy for Plant Conservations post 2020 strategy.

2) Metro West's strategic public transport plan aims to establish a passenger rail service along the track on the North Somerset side of the Avon Gorge. Working directly with North Somerset District Council, the National Trust and Forestry England, the Botanic Garden has used its expertise and knowledge to propagate the famous whitebeams (*Sorbus*), many of which have evolved in the Avon Gorge. These trees have seeded into the rail tunnel stonework and must be removed. We have collected seeds and grown these very rare trees, often doubling their numbers in the wild. In partnership with the Forestry England the first of these trees have been planted into a newly established reserve creating a biodiversity net gain.

3) The Botanic Garden has one of the largest living collections of South African flora in the UK, many collected in partnership with the Garden Route Botanic Garden and Southern Cape Herbarium. The Botanic Garden has worked with Kirstenbosch in Cape Town and has been involved in growing ex-situ cultivation of some of South Africa's most threatened flora. We display our South African collections in a series of ecological displays, at the centre of which is a traditional thatched African rondavel, (built by public donation). This was formally opened by Beryl Rogers, Board Chairperson of the South African National Biodiversity Institute, who said 'the rondavel and plant collections help celebrate African heritage'.

4) A mecca for Flora & Fauna Film - Plant material from the gardens extensive plant collections and advice from specialist botanical staff have been used for thirty years in natural history film making, including BBC Private Life of Plants in 1992 and the BBC Green Planet series, first broadcast to a worldwide audience in January 2022. Both these landmark plant series and many others have been presented by Sir David Attenborough and feature the University of Bristol Botanic Garden in the programme credits.

5) The Friends of the Botanic Garden (The Friends) are a registered charity separate to the University, and intrinsically linked to the Botanic Garden, providing a valuable source of funding to help the running, development and educational work of the Botanic Garden. Founded in 1975, the Friends provide community support for the Botanic Garden, with many helping through an active volunteering scheme as; practical horticulturists, garden guides, event volunteers, plant records and welcoming visitors. The financial value of the volunteer hours to the Botanic Garden exceeds £120K p.a. The contribution of the volunteers to the work of the Botanic Garden was recognised in 2018 by the 'Queens Award for Voluntary Service'. The award was presented to the Friends at the Botanic Garden by HRH The Duke of Kent.

Summary

The University of Bristol Botanic Garden is special in several ways: it has an internationally important plant collection; including many rare and threatened local plants; it is used widely for teaching across the University; with students from all Faculties benefiting from its presence, and it provides a valuable resource for research materials, projects, and activities. In short, the University of Bristol Botanic Garden provides a place of inspiration, education, research and rejuvenation for university staff and students, along with many thousands of members of the public.

From a commercial perspective the Botanic Garden and associated activities (such as RHS courses) will be underpinned by a five-year business plan to demonstrate how the income will be diversified and grown through becoming a more attractive, intensively used destination which capitalises on event opportunities to close the gap between operating costs and university subsidy thus reducing the reliance on university funding, whilst recognising the value the facility already provides and what can be achieved through investment for the future.