



# Sustainable Lab Awards Participants' Guide

Updated September 2024

## Introduction

Welcome to the Lab Awards! The [Lab Awards](#) are a part of the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability (SRS Department) Sustainability Awards programme, which also includes the Changemaker Awards.

The Lab Awards are open to teams of staff from any lab-based University department, school, unit, centre, etc. Throughout the year teams will work together to improve sustainability in their workplace, basing their efforts on the Lab Awards Criteria (available in spreadsheet format).

Teams can join and complete their application at any time of the year, and will be assessed then accredited on a rolling basis. Peer auditing helps to ensure that departments meet the sustainability standards set out in the criteria framework and facilitates sharing of best practice and innovation. Successful teams will receive a certificate, digital graphics and communications to help share news of your achievement.

## Why participate?

There are many reasons to participate in the Lab Awards:

- The three Lab Award levels provide **a framework for incremental development** and **longer-term sustainability**. Teams will continuously improve by progressing through the scheme.
- The Lab Awards recognise departments that have established **good value**, resource efficient business processes.
- Teams will have access to **support and advice** from the SRS Department throughout the year.
- The Lab Awards are a fantastic opportunity for staff to develop **leadership and teamwork** skills by **working as a team** with colleagues.
- Participants have opportunities to **learn from and network with other teams** from around the University, including mentorship.
- Departments will gain a **sustainability accreditation** which helps demonstrate commitment and action to funding bodies.

## Lab Awards and the Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, were adopted by the United Nations and world leaders in 2015. By 2030, the SDGs aim to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) developed the [Sustainable Development Goal Accord](#) (SDGa), which the University of Edinburgh has signed up to. Through its research, learning and teaching, operations and community of staff, students and alumni, the University is committed to delivering these Goals with partners, including the Students' Association, both locally and globally. Contributing to the SDGs is a key part of the [Social and Civic Responsibility focus](#) within the University's [Strategy 2030](#).

The Sustainability Awards encourage action on a range of environmental and social issues, and each Awards criterion links to one of the 17 SDGs. These links are detailed in the Labs Criteria document, and you can learn more about each SDG [here](#). By participating in the Sustainability Awards, you and your team will be directly contributing to helping achieve the SDGs.

The EAUC have collated further examples of [how the SDGs can be embedded](#) within Higher and Further Education institutions.



## Sustainability Champions Network

Join a network of staff and students making the University of Edinburgh more sustainable by developing skills to lead positive change in your area of work.

The [Sustainability Champions Network](#) offers opportunities to increase your sustainability knowledge, gain professional and personal development, help empower others, attend events, and make your voice heard. We highly recommend that at least one member of the Awards team [join the network](#).

## Criteria Themes and Levels

To receive a Lab Award teams must meet criteria set out across nine categories:

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Key Principles</b>
<b>1. Fume Cupboards and Biosafety Cabinets (BSCs)</b>	1: Fume cupboards and other containment devices are working safely and efficiently when in use. 2: Fume cupboards and other containment devices are in low or zero energy states when not in use.
<b>2. Cold Storage</b>	1: Cold storage requirements are minimised through effective sample management and other means. 2: Cold storage devices are energy efficient and used appropriately.
<b>3. Chemicals and gases</b>	1: Chemicals and materials are stored safely and used efficiently. 2: Chemicals and materials hazardous to health or the environment are substituted wherever possible.
<b>4. Scientific Equipment</b>	1: Equipment is used efficiently, with high utilisation and turning off or down when not in use. 2: Energy, water and waste costs are calculated for, and significantly influence, equipment procurement.
<b>5. Water</b>	1: Water is used efficiently and recirculated wherever possible. 2: Purified water is used appropriately and sparingly.
<b>6. Waste and Recycling</b>	1: There are effective mechanisms to maximise reuse & recycling of materials and equipment. 2: Hazardous and special waste is minimised
<b>7. Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC)</b>	1: Laboratory conditions are comfortable for users. 2: The HVAC system is working to specification and well maintained and air flows are appropriate.

<b>8. Lighting</b>	1: There is maximum use of natural lighting 2: Lighting is appropriate to user requirements and is always turned off or down when not required.
<b>9. Knowledge Sharing and Training</b>	1. The importance of energy and environmental issues is conveyed to laboratory users. 2. The lab has a responsibility structure for, and is connected to networks on, environmental improvement.

Teams can work towards a Lab Award at Bronze, Silver or Gold level. Additionally, to recognise the valuable experience of existing teams, those who have previously participated have the option of mentoring another team.

- **Bronze:** Bronze level recognises teams that follow good practice and have made efforts to raise awareness of sustainability amongst staff. There are a total of 15 Bronze criteria of which 13 should be met in order to receive a Bronze Lab Award, unless teams can demonstrate that certain criteria are not applicable to them.
- **Silver:** Silver level recognises teams that have gone further to promote a culture of sustainability by establishing resource efficient procedures and environmentally-friendly ways of working, and have made efforts to engage with staff. There are a total of 19 Silver criteria, 16 of which should be met in order to receive a Silver Lab Award, unless teams can demonstrate that certain criteria are not applicable to them. Teams applying for Silver should also demonstrate that they are compliant with Bronze level.
- **Gold:** Gold level recognises exemplary teams that demonstrate and actively develop best practice in lab sustainability. There are a total of 27 Gold criteria, 21 of which should be met in order to receive a Gold Lab Award, unless teams can demonstrate that certain criteria are not applicable to them. Teams applying for Gold should also demonstrate that they are compliant with Silver level.

NOTE: Some labs may find that a number of criteria are not relevant to them e.g. they have no cold storage equipment, or do not use fume cupboards. In these instances teams would not be expected to complete any non-applicable criteria. The team would still be able to drop the same number of criteria as other teams applying for an award at the same level (i.e. 1 in Bronze, 2 in Silver and 3 in Gold). Additionally, some criteria are optional e.g. mentoring, and are not required to complete a level.

If you think a level has a large number of not applicable criteria, a lab walk around/discussion will be offered to confirm the Award level's suitability and if alternative criteria could be undertaken. Please get in touch to discuss further ([lab.awards@ed.ac.uk](mailto:lab.awards@ed.ac.uk)).

## Mentoring

This opportunity will allow teams who have completed an award to offer support to another team who are completing their chosen level for the first time. Teams are able to mentor others of the same or lower level to them e.g. Bronze teams may mentor new Bronze teams, Silver teams may mentor Silver or Bronze, and Gold may mentor at any level.

To be eligible to mentor, your team must have achieved an award within the last 2 years. Mentorship will not replace participating in a Bronze/Silver/Gold level but would be undertaken as an additional achievement.

As the nature of mentorship is highly variable and unique to each partnership, there are no specific criteria to complete other than the following. We will expect teams to commit to:

- Communicating at least monthly with each other
- Undertake visits to each other's workplaces
- Provide a case study on their experience (e.g. written, video, other format)

## Assessment

Teams are assessed to ensure they have met the sustainability criteria. This involves reviewing evidence submitted online and an audit of the lab.

- **Submitting evidence online:** Teams are asked to submit details of some departmental procedures and activities to our [Sharepoint platform](#) in advance of their audit. Assessors will review the evidence and request more information if necessary. Submitting evidence to the online platform is not mandatory for any criteria but is strongly encouraged as it speeds up the audit and serves as a useful record. However, it is recognised that for some criteria it is easier to demonstrate compliance during an audit. Evidence can be transferred over from year to year on the online platform, which can be a useful way to save time where there has been little or no change.
- **Face-to-face audit:** Some activities are easier to explain in person or are difficult / time consuming to evidence online, particularly at Silver and Gold level. We therefore undertake face-to-face audits of all teams. This is an opportunity to discuss teams' accomplishments, challenges and future aspirations in more detail. A typical audit lasts around 2 hours. The audit will be conducted by a representative of the SRS Department and a peer auditor from another participating team. **All participating teams are asked to provide a volunteer auditor to undertake one or two audits per year.** Where teams are being audited for a higher level (silver/gold) the audit will include some elements of the lower level(s) but will focus mainly on the higher level criteria.

Teams will receive the results of their assessment within two weeks. This will include confirmation of the Lab Award level received, an audit summary with feedback, a certificate and digital graphics for social media and email signatures.

**NOTE:** If auditing the lab in person is not possible, a virtual audit will be arranged. In such circumstances, providing evidence on the online platform will be particularly helpful.

### Entering for the first time

We recommend that new teams work towards Bronze level during their first year, although ambitious teams are welcome to work to achieve Silver level should they wish.

### Staying at the same level

Once a team has achieved a level of accreditation, the award remains valid for two years. Teams can choose to remain at the same level continuously, or apply for a higher level at any point.

### Progressing to the next level

Teams are welcome to begin working towards their next level at any time, with no need to wait for a new academic or calendar year.



# BRONZE

Prior requirements	NONE
Criteria to complete	BRONZE
Reassessment	EVERY 2 YEARS ★



**+** Optional:  
Once Bronze is completed,  
teams can mentor new  
Bronze teams



# SILVER

Prior requirements	NONE
Criteria to complete	SILVER
Reassessment	EVERY 2 YEARS ★



**+** Optional:  
Once Silver is completed,  
teams can mentor new Bronze  
and Silver teams



# GOLD

Prior requirements	SILVER
Criteria to complete	GOLD
Reassessment	EVERY 2 YEARS ★



**+** Optional:  
Once Gold is completed,  
teams can mentor any  
team up to Gold level

## Commitment

Each Lab Awards level differs in the amount of commitment typically required from teams:

- **Bronze:** Bronze level recognises departments/labs that follow good practice and have made efforts to raise awareness of sustainability amongst staff and are following basic good practices for lab management and health & safety. New Bronze teams often find that their department already meets many of the Bronze criteria, so working towards a Bronze Lab Award is a matter of gathering evidence for existing activities and filling in the gaps. Participation can be coordinated by 1 staff member from the department but we would encourage colleagues to work together as a team!
- **Silver:** Silver level recognises departments/labs that have established sustainable procedures and ways of working, and have made efforts to engage with staff. New Silver teams will likely find that their department meets some, but not all, of the Silver criteria. It's easiest to complete Silver if colleagues work together as a team.
- **Gold:** Successful Gold teams have significant engagement from the wider department/lab. Gold participants are required to meet a number of challenging criteria which will require the support of the whole team.
- **Mentoring:** Teams who would like to mentor another team will be involved in offering support and advice to their mentees. To successfully share experiences and knowledge, it is recommended that mentorship is offered as a team effort rather than from one individual. The time commitment will vary depending on the level of award being sought, but we would expect at least monthly contact between teams including visits.

Although the Lab Awards are aimed at staff, teams are strongly encouraged to involve students where possible, to ensure their feedback and ideas are taken into consideration.



## Support for teams

Teams will have access to support and advice from the SRS Department throughout the year, including the offer of:

- An initial online/Teams meeting to discuss the Awards in detail.
- Invitations to any joint networking events.
- An in-person lab visit to provide advice and indication of progress against criteria.
- Professional development opportunities, including opportunities to take part in peer auditing.
- Training opportunities (contact [lab.awards@ed.ac.uk](mailto:lab.awards@ed.ac.uk) to discuss).
- A [Sharepoint online platform](#) enabling teams to track their accomplishments and store evidence.
- [Resources and templates](#) to help teams complete criteria.
- An audit summary highlighting achievements and areas for improvement.
- A digital certificate and graphics for use on social media and email signatures to demonstrate your achievement.

## Timeline

The Lab Awards are updated annually, and run on a rolling basis. Teams are welcome to join and complete their submission at any point in the year.

## Next Steps

- **Returning teams:** SRS will be in touch with previous participants to discuss plans for the coming year.
- **New teams:** New or interested teams should contact SRS at [lab.awards@ed.ac.uk](mailto:lab.awards@ed.ac.uk) to arrange an initial meeting. In the meantime, it would be helpful to:
  1. Secure support for participating in the Lab Awards from senior managers in your department.
  2. Look through the Lab Awards Criteria. This will be available on the [SRS website](#).
  3. Speak to your colleagues about forming a team.