
**Beyond the Classroom: Integrating Green Human Resource
Management into Faculty Recruitment at FEP (Faculty of
Economics, University of Porto) to Enhance Global
Sustainability Rankings**

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Biographic note/Nota Biográfica

Ana Lúcia Lopes finished her bachelor's degree in accounting and administration at ISCAP in 2021 and is currently completing her master's in management at FEP. In 2024, she also completed the Pedagogical Competency Certificate.

Over the past three years, Ana has been invited to support students in the Financial Calculus course at ISCAP, and for the past five years, she has mentored students in mathematics and economic-related subjects, reflecting her dedication and enthusiasm to education and knowledge-sharing.

Ana is deeply passionate about nature, the environment, and the transformative potential of students. She believes that the future lies in the hands of students and the teachers who guide them, emphasizing the critical importance of fostering sustainability within universities.

Aspiring to become a full-time teacher, Ana aims to inspire future generations through education and to advocate for greener practices that will help shape a more sustainable future.

Her commitment to environmental stewardship and education drives her current research, which focuses on integrating green human resource management into institutional sustainability frameworks such as QS rankings.

Through this work, Ana aims to inspire universities to adopt greener practices, shaping a more sustainable future.

Abstract

In the context of growing global attention to sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, higher education institutions are under increasing pressure to align their governance, teaching, and research with sustainability principles. Faculty recruitment plays a critical role in this process, as academic staff shape curricula, conduct research, and influence institutional culture. However, in many public universities, including those in Portugal, recruitment frameworks remain silent on sustainability-related competencies, resulting in a gap between institutional commitments and hiring practices. The present study aims to address this gap by examining the Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto as a single-case study, assessing the current integration of sustainability into faculty recruitment, and proposing a criterion to explicitly value sustainability-related competencies. Drawing on the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity Theory, the Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, and Social Exchange Theory, this qualitative research analyses institutional regulations, strategic plans, and public sustainability commitments, complemented by best practices from leading international universities. The findings reveal that while sustainability is central to FEP’s strategic positioning and participation in international rankings such as *QS Sustainability*, it is not yet operationalised in recruitment processes. The proposed sustainability criterion addresses this misalignment by embedding competencies related to sustainable teaching, research, and community engagement into the selection process. This study contributes to the literature on Green Human Resource Management in higher education and offers practical guidance for policymakers and university leaders seeking to align faculty hiring with sustainability goals.

Keywords: Faculty Recruitment, Green Human Resource Management, Green Recruitment, Public Universities, Sustainable Development Goals, Strategic Human Resource Management, Sustainability in Higher Education.

JEL-codes: I23, M12, M59, Q01, Q56.

Resumo

No contexto da crescente atenção global para a sustentabilidade e os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável das Nações Unidas, as instituições de ensino superior enfrentam uma pressão cada vez maior para alinhar a sua governação, ensino e investigação com princípios de sustentabilidade. O recrutamento de docentes desempenha um papel crítico neste processo, uma vez que o corpo académico molda os currículos, desenvolve investigação e influencia a cultura institucional. No entanto, em muitas universidades públicas, incluindo as portuguesas, os enquadramentos de recrutamento permanecem omissos quanto a competências relacionadas com a sustentabilidade, resultando num desfasamento entre os compromissos institucionais e as práticas de contratação. O presente estudo procura colmatar esta lacuna, examinando a Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto como estudo de caso, avaliando a atual integração da sustentabilidade no recrutamento docente e propondo um critério que valorize explicitamente competências relacionadas com a sustentabilidade. Com base na Teoria AMO (Habilidade–Motivação–Oportunidade), na Visão Baseada em Recursos (RBV), na Teoria dos Stakeholders e na Teoria da Troca Social, esta investigação qualitativa analisa regulamentos institucionais, planos estratégicos e compromissos públicos de sustentabilidade, complementados por boas práticas de universidades internacionais de referência. Os resultados revelam que, embora a sustentabilidade seja central no posicionamento estratégico da FEP e na sua participação em rankings internacionais como o *QS Sustainability*, ainda não está operacionalizada nos processos de recrutamento. O critério de sustentabilidade proposto procura corrigir este desalinhamento, integrando competências relacionadas com ensino, investigação e envolvimento comunitário sustentáveis no processo de seleção. Este estudo contribui para a literatura sobre Gestão Verde de Recursos Humanos no ensino superior e oferece orientações práticas para decisores políticos e líderes universitários que pretendam alinhar o recrutamento docente com os objetivos de sustentabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Recrutamento Docente, Gestão Verde de Recursos Humanos, Recrutamento Sustentável, Universidades Públicas, Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável, Gestão Estratégica de Recursos Humanos, Sustentabilidade no Ensino Superior.

Códigos JEL: I23, M12, M59, Q01, Q56.

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Abbreviations

AMO – Ability-Motivation-Opportunity

e.g. – *exempli gratia* (For example)

ECDU – *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária* (Statute of the University Teaching Career)

ESD – Education for Sustainable Development

ESG – Environmental, Social and Governance

FCT – *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia* (Foundation for Science and Technology)

FEP – Faculty of Economics of Porto

GHG – Greenhouse Gas

GRHM – Green Human Resource Management

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

HR – Human Resource

HRM – Human Resource Management

ISO – International Organization for Standardization

OCDE – *Organização para a Cooperação e Desenvolvimento Económico* (Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development)

PRME – Principles for Responsible Management Education

QS – Quacquarelli Symonds

RBV – Resource-Based View

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

SET – Social Exchange Theory

SHRM – Strategic Human Resource Management

STARS – Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System

UI – University of Indonesia

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UP – University of Porto

VEMP – *Valor Experiência e Mérito Pedagógico* (Teaching and Pedagogical Merit)

VGU – *Valor Gestão Universitária* (University Management)

VMC – *Valor Mérito Científico* (Scientific Merit)

VTC – *Valorização do Conhecimento* (Knowledge Valorization and Outreach)

Introduction

Over the last decades, the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in promoting social, economic, and environmental progress has gained unprecedented attention (Renwick et al., 2013; Zahrani, 2024). HEIs are not only responsible for producing skilled graduates but also for generating knowledge, fostering innovation, and influencing societal transformation (Brooks et al., 2024; Reyes et al., 2019). Globally, they are recognised as essential actors in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly by equipping students to act as informed, responsible citizens capable of addressing complex challenges such as climate change, inequality, and resource scarcity (Suklun & Bengu, 2024; OECD, 2020). In this context, integrating sustainability principles into teaching, research, and institutional governance has emerged as a central strategic priority.

Green Human Resource Management refers to the integration of environmental management into human resource policies and practices, aiming to develop a workforce that actively supports organisational sustainability (Bangwal et al., 2015; Bangwal et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013; Miah et al., 2024; OECD, 2025; Zahrani, 2024). Within GHRM, green recruitment is a key practice, encompassing the attraction, selection, and onboarding of candidates who possess environmental knowledge, values, and skills (Bangwal, 2025; Jamil et al., 2023; Zahrani, 2024).

According to Faeni et al., (2025) and Cesário et al., (2022), green recruitment not only strengthens an organisation's sustainability performance but also contributes to long-term competitive advantage by implanting environmental commitment into its human capital. In the higher education context, green recruitment may involve selecting faculty who can integrate sustainability into curricula, research agendas, and community engagement, thereby amplifying the institution's contribution to the SDGs (Lighfinch, 2023).

Previous studies have highlighted that universities play a unique role in sustainability transitions, given their ability to influence both present and future generations (Fia et al., 2022; Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Pausits, 2017; Suklun & Bengu, 2024). Research has demonstrated the benefits of embedding sustainability into organisational structures,

including improved stakeholder legitimacy, enhanced innovation capacity, and stronger alignment with global sustainability frameworks (Hooi et al., 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2023).

In HRM literature, sustainable recruitment has been associated with higher employee morale, better retention, and increased organisational reputation (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2015; Cooke, 2025; Gupta et al., 2025). However, the focus in HEIs sustainability research has often been on operational measures, such as energy efficiency and waste reduction, rather than on human capital strategies, despite evidence that academic staff are central to implementing and reporting sustainability practices (Mo & Wang, 2023; OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

While there is extensive research on GHRM in corporate settings, the intersection between academic recruitment and sustainability remains underexplored (Faeni et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013). Specifically, little is known about how sustainability-related competencies can be formally embedded into recruitment processes in public universities, where hiring is often constrained by national regulations (Pausits, 2017; OECD, 2020). In Portugal, the *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária* (ECDU) ¹ defines strict academic recruitment criteria, yet it makes no explicit reference to sustainability skills or teaching approaches. As Zahrani (2024) and OECD (2025) notes, without aligning recruitment with sustainability goals, universities risk perpetuating a gap between their sustainability strategies and the human capital responsible for implementing them.

To address this gap, this study examines the case of the Faculty of Economics (FEP), an organic unit of the University of Porto with statutory, scientific, pedagogical, administrative, and financial autonomy (Universidade do Porto, n.d.-c). The analysis assesses the extent to which sustainability is currently integrated into faculty recruitment and proposes a criterion that explicitly values sustainability-related competencies. Specifically, it aims to analyse existing recruitment regulations and institutional policies at FEP; identify international best practices in green recruitment in higher education; and finally, to propose a theoretically grounded sustainability criterion adapted to the Portuguese public university context. This study draws upon the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity Theory (Bangwal et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013), the Resource-Based View

¹ Portugal. (2019). *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (versão consolidada)* [Statute of the University Teaching Career (consolidated version)]. *Diário da República*. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1979-72873110>. Accessed August 4, 2025.

(Chowdhury et al., 2023, Gupta et al., 2025), Stakeholder Theory (Aboramadan, 2022; Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Ribeiro & Gavronski, 2021; Suklun et al., 2024), and Social Exchange Theory (Chan & Hsieh, 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2023) to explain the strategic value of integrating sustainability into faculty recruitment.

The study offers three main contributions. First, it extends GHRM literature by applying green recruitment concepts to HEIs, an often-overlooked context. Second, it contributes to higher education policy by showing how sustainability-oriented hiring can reinforce institutional strategy and improve performance in sustainability rankings such as QS. Third, it makes a methodological contribution by developing a theoretically informed framework for evaluating and proposing sustainability-based recruitment criteria in a regulated academic environment. Practically, the findings may assist university leaders, policymakers, and HR managers in embedding sustainability into recruitment, ensuring that faculty hiring actively supports institutional commitments to the SDGs.

The remainder of this dissertation reviews the literature on sustainability in higher education and GHRM, outlines the methodology, presents the case study findings, and discusses their theoretical and practical implications.

Literature review

Green Human Resource Management and Strategic Perspectives

This section explores the evolution of GHRM within the broader context of sustainable development, SHRM, and CS. By examining key concepts such as SDGs, ESG metrics, and green recruitment, it highlights how HR practices contribute to sustainability in HEIs.

Strategic Human Resource Management and Sustainability

SHRM focuses on aligning HR practices with business strategy to improve organizational performance, often with a strong emphasis on economic value (Cooke, 2025; Faeni et al., 2025; Starkey & Crane, 2023; Zahrani, 2024). However, the evolution toward sustainable HRM reflects a shift from a shareholder-centric approach to one that balances the interests of employees, organizations, and society (Cesário et al., 2022; Jamil et al., 2023). Rather than replacing SHRM, sustainable HRM builds upon it by integrating long-term environmental, social, and ethical concerns into the HRM ecosystem (Faeni et al., 2025). This includes enabling HR practices that invest in people, empower employees, and consider both internal and external stakeholders as part of a broader sustainability strategy (Cooke, 2025; Wilkinson, 2001). As such, sustainable HRM represents a natural progression of SHRM, embracing a multiple-value orientation that supports sustainability transitions in institutions like universities, enhancing organizational value by aligning human capital with long-term strategic goals (Cooke, 2025; Dumont, 2017; Gupta et al., 2025).

As Chowdhury et al. (2023) and Renwick et al. (2013) emphasize, HR practices that develop employee capabilities, such as environmental training, green recruitment, and involvement in ecological initiatives, can lead to higher productivity, reduced waste, and increased innovation. These practices not only improve environmental outcomes but also strengthen a firm's competitive advantage by attracting highly qualified, environmentally conscious professionals. As Fia et al. (2022) and Suklun et al., (2024) argue, higher education institutions that successfully embed sustainability in their strategic frameworks: mission, governance, and operations, benefit from improved credibility, performance, and stakeholder engagement.

This national concern is also reflected in Portuguese public policy: the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 13/2023² explicitly highlights the importance of investing in human resources and training as part of the country's strategy for sustainable public procurement. Therefore, sustainable HRM serves as both a strategic and operational bridge between institutional sustainability goals and the human capital required to achieve them (Aboramadan, 2022; Basheer et al., 2025).

Transformative Role of Green Human Resource Management

GHRM integrates environmental concerns into HR practices such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and reward systems, aiming to align organizational behaviour with sustainability goals (Bangwal et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013). It is increasingly recognized as a strategic tool to promote environmental performance, employee engagement, and organizational commitment to sustainability (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2015; Zahrani, 2024). Practices like green training and green performance appraisals are particularly effective in shaping pro-environmental behaviours, while green recruitment alone may not ensure long-term commitment unless supported by a sustainability-oriented culture and leadership (Coelho et al., 2024; Dumont et al., 2017; Miah et al., 2024; Zahrani, 2024).

The benefits of GHRM include improved employee morale, stronger employer branding, increased retention, cost savings, and reduced environmental impact (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2015; Faeni et al., 2025; Zahrani, 2024). However, challenges persist, such as fragmented definitions, lack of integration into traditional HR functions, and limited adoption in some contexts, where environmental literacy and top management support are still developing (Coelho et al., 2024; Cosenza et al., 2025). Despite these challenges, GHRM offers a multidisciplinary and transformative framework for embedding sustainability into daily HR operations and long-term institutional strategy (Aboramadan, 2022; Cesário et al., 2022; Wilkinson et al., 2001), promoting ethical reflection (Starkey & Crane, 2003).

Green Recruitment and Employee Engagement

Green recruitment refers to the strategic hiring of individuals whose values, skills, and behaviours align with environmental sustainability goals (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2015; Bauer et

² Presidency of the Council of Ministers. (2023). Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 13/2023: National Strategy for Green Public Procurement 2030 — ECO360. *Diário da República*, 1st Series, No. 30, 10 February, 193–223. <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/resolucao-conselho-ministros/13-2023-208079331>

al., 2020; Faeni et al., 2025; Zahrani, 2024). By embedding environmental concerns into job advertisements, selection criteria, and onboarding processes, organizations can enhance their reputation, attract sustainability-minded candidates, and align recruitment with broader sustainability strategies (Cesário et al., 2022; Jamil et al., 2023; Renwick et al., 2013). These practices also serve as a foundation for building a green organizational culture and promoting innovation in sustainable products and services (Aboramadan, 2022; Bauer et al., 2020; Faeni et al., 2025). Employee engagement plays a critical role in the success of HRM (Basheer et al., 2025; Faeni et al., 2025). In recent years, recruitment practices have evolved to embrace a skills-first approach, where demonstrated competencies are prioritized over formal qualifications such as degrees or job titles (OECD, 2025). This shift is particularly relevant in the context of green recruitment, as organizations seek candidates who not only meet academic standards but also possess sustainability-related skills and values. Moreover, skills-based recruitment practices such as structured interviews and portfolio evaluations can help identify candidates whose values align with institutional sustainability goals, reinforcing the strategic role of Green HRM in higher education (Grabowski et al., 2024).

Research consistently shows that hiring faculty with expertise or commitment to sustainability has a direct impact on curricular orientation. Barth and Rieckmann (2012) and Brahm & Kühner(2019), argue that sustainability competences among academic staff act as catalysts for curriculum change, since faculty naturally integrate new perspectives and pedagogical approaches into the courses, demonstrating that faculty motivation and personal values strongly influence whether sustainability principles are incorporated into course content, even when the subject is not explicitly related to sustainability. More recent evidence from Leal Filho et al. (2025) confirms that sustainability-oriented teaching practices introduced by faculty across diverse disciplines shape institutional culture and student learning outcomes. Collectively, these studies suggest that recruiting academics with sustainability-related knowledge or predispositions increases the likelihood that such principles will be embedded across curricula, whether through case studies, applied projects, or the integration of the United Nations SDGs as conceptual frameworks (Laivuori, 2025). Through environmental training, participative decision-making, and green performance appraisals, employees are empowered to contribute actively to environmental improvements (Chowdhury et al., 2023; Renwick et al., 2013).

The Role of Universities in Achieving the SDGs at Agenda 2030

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states, outlines 17 SDGs and 169 targets aimed at addressing global challenges such as poverty, climate change, social inequality, and environmental degradation (European Environment Agency, 2019; European Environment Agency, 2020; Eurostat, 2025; FCT, n.d.; United Nations. n.d.-a; United Nations. n.d.-b) (*see Annex I – The 17 Sustainable Development Goals*). Although not legally binding, the SDGs call on institutions, including universities, to take ownership and implement strategic actions aligned with these goals (Eurostat, 2025; Cooke, 2025; Suklun & Bengu, 2024; United Nations. n.d.-b). Higher education institutions play a critical role in advancing the SDGs by fostering sustainability-oriented knowledge, research, and human capital development (Filho et al., 2018; Filho et al., 2024; Leal Filho et al., 2021). They contribute through curriculum design, interdisciplinary research, community engagement, and sustainable campus operations (European Environment Agency, 2020; Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Nölting et al., 2020).

In line with the broader European trend, these shared priorities demonstrate a alignment with the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and reinforce the importance of universities aligning their activities with these objectives (European Environment Agency, 2019; European Environment Agency 2020). Universities are therefore not only expected to educate for sustainable development but also to lead by example in operational practices and institutional culture (Filho et al., 2024; Lin & Chen, 2025; Mille, 2024; Pausits, 2017). Their capacity to integrate SDGs across governance and academic functions is essential to achieving systemic change.

Environmental, Social, and Governance Metrics in Universities

The ESG framework, originally developed in corporate contexts, is gaining increasing prominence in higher education institutions as a strategic tool for institutional sustainability, competitiveness, and stakeholder trust (Amorós et al., 2023; Chan & Hsieh, 2022; Lin & Chen, 2025; Mo & Wang, 2023). In this context, universities are not only adopting certifications such as ISO 50001 and ISO 14064, but also integrating sustainability across teaching, governance, and infrastructure therefore, improving their positioning in global rankings such as STARS, UI GreenMetric, and QS Sustainability Ranking (Chan & Hsieh, 2022; Filho et al., 2024; Grabowski et al., 2024). Students also play an increasingly important role as internal stakeholders demanding visible and measurable ESG commitments, including

sustainable curricula, carbon-neutral policies, and transparent governance (Filho et al., 2024; Lin & Chen, 2025). These expectations are influencing enrolment decisions, institutional loyalty, and academic reputation (Amorós et al., 2023; Filho et al., 2018; Filho et al., 2024). As Mo and Wang (2023) note, faculty members are key actors in implementing and reporting sustainability efforts, making Green HRM a central mechanism for operationalizing ESG values. Therefore, ESG metrics not only support external accountability but also reinforce the internal alignment between institutional strategy and academic staff recruitment, justifying the need to prioritize sustainability-related competencies in hiring processes (Chan & Hsieh, 2022; Filho et al., 2024; Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Lin & Chen, 2025).

Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

This dissertation uses key theoretical models to support the integration of Green Human Resource Management into university recruitment and sustainability strategies. These frameworks explain how HR practices shape performance, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable academic cultures.

Ability–Motivation–Opportunity Theory

The Ability-Motivation-Opportunity Theory (AMO) is widely used in GHRM to explain how HR practices influence environmental performance (Bangwal et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013). According to this model, sustainability outcomes improve when employees have the ability (e.g., through green recruitment and training), motivation (e.g., via rewards and recognition), and opportunity to engage in environmental initiatives (Renwick et al., 2013; Bangwal et al., 2025). In higher education, the AMO framework supports the integration of sustainability into academic recruitment by emphasizing green competencies, environmental commitment, and institutional support for sustainable actions (Gupta et al., 2025; Zahrani, 2024). At FEP, this framework supports the inclusion of sustainability criteria in faculty recruitment processes by ensuring that candidates not only have the competencies and knowledge to teach and engage with sustainability topics but also demonstrate motivation to do so and are given institutional support to integrate sustainability into their academic roles. Thus, the AMO theory provides a foundation for aligning recruitment with FEP's broader sustainability goals and its positioning in international sustainability rankings.

Resource-Based View Theory

The Resource-Based View Theory (RBV) highlights how organizations can achieve a sustained competitive advantage by developing and leveraging unique internal resources, such as knowledge, skills, and capabilities (Chowdhury et al., 2023, Gupta et al., 2025). In the context of GHRM, HR practices are seen as strategic assets that foster environmental commitment and green behaviours among employees (Cesário et al., 2022; Cooke, 2025; Faeni, 2025; Gupta et al., 2025; Hooi et al., 2022). The RBV framework hence supports the argument that integrating sustainability into HR practices, including academic recruitment, can strengthen a university's long-term competitive position. In the case of FEP, the RBV theory justifies the value of recruiting faculty members with sustainability-related expertise and pedagogical innovation to enhance the institution's distinctiveness and performance.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that organizations create long-term value by engaging with all relevant internal and external stakeholders whose interests affect or are affected by the organization's actions (Aboramadan, 2022; Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Ribeiro & Gavronski, 2021; Suklun et al., 2024), including students, faculty, funders, employers, and society in general. In the context of sustainability, this theory highlights the need to balance diverse expectations and moral values to align institutional goals with stakeholder interests (Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Ribeiro & Gavronski, 2021). In higher education, Stakeholder Theory supports the integration of sustainability principles such as the Sustainable Development Goals into university policies, recruitment, and curricula as a response to both internal commitments and external pressures (Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Suklun et al., 2024; World Bank, 2023). At FEP, the integration of sustainability-related hiring criteria directly responds to increasing stakeholder demand for ethical responsibility, environmental awareness, and social value. Therefore, this theory reinforces the institutional relevance of aligning faculty recruitment with the expectations of a sustainability-conscious academic community.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers a valuable lens for understanding the relationship between GHRM and employee behaviour (Chan & Hsieh, 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2023). It suggests that when organizations provide support through environmentally responsible

practices, employees feel a sense of reciprocal obligation leading to stronger organizational citizenship behaviour and reduced turnover (Cesário et al., 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Zahrani, 2024). In the context of GHRM, SET explains how green initiatives such as sustainability training or green incentives can foster employee commitment to environmental goals (Bangwal et al., 2025; Faeni et al., 2025). However, the level of this commitment can vary depending on individual values, leadership styles, and organizational culture (Aboramadan, 2022; Basheer et al., 2025; Cesário et al., 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Zahrani, 2024). As Faeni et al. (2025) highlight, SET provides the theoretical basis for understanding how supportive green HR practices translate into pro-environmental behaviour, ultimately reinforcing a sustainable organizational identity.

At FEP, SET helps explain how the recruitment of sustainability-oriented faculty, when supported by training, recognition, and opportunities for pedagogical innovation, can lead to greater staff satisfaction and stronger alignment with institutional sustainability values. This reciprocity strengthens FEP's organizational identity and promotes a consistent sustainability culture within teaching, research, and community engagement.

University Rankings and Sustainability Performance

International university rankings are a powerful tool for assessing and comparing higher education institutions, shaping their global reputation, attractiveness to students, and competitiveness in research and partnerships (Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Grabowski et al., 2024; Lightfinch, 2023). Among these, the QS Sustainability Ranking stand out for incorporating explicit sustainability-related metrics (Amorós et al., 2023; Filho et al., 2024; Grabowski et al., 2024; Lightfinch, 2023). It involves the submission of contact information, participation in academic and employer reputation surveys, and the provision of detailed institutional data (Qs Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025). The QS Sustainability Ranking is currently the only prestigious global ranking that combines environmental sustainability, social impact, and institutional governance into its assessment (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025; Lightfinch, 2023). Its indicators include Sustainable Education, Impact of Education, Employability and Opportunities (*see appendix 2 – Indicators of QS Sustainable Ranking*). These metrics are directly influenced by the presence of faculty members who integrate sustainability into their teaching and research, making academic recruitment an essential driver of performance in this ranking.

Green recruitment practices, particularly those aimed at attracting faculty with sustainability expertise and commitment, can generate measurable improvements across multiple ranking indicators (Filho et al., 2024; Jamil et al., 2023; Zahrani, 2024). The literature shows that aligning ESG implementation, GHRM practices, and ranking metrics is a strategic move for universities (Amorós et al., 2023; Filho et al., 2024).

Recruiting faculty with sustainability-related competencies not only strengthens the institution's internal culture and strategic positioning but also contributes directly to the external performance measures used in global rankings (Amorós Molina et al., 2023; Chan & Hsieh, 2022; Filho et al., 2024). For FEP, integrating sustainability criteria into faculty recruitment could therefore deliver a dual return: reinforcing its organizational sustainability culture while improving its standing in rankings that drive institutional visibility, student recruitment, and international collaboration opportunities.

Research gaps and justification for the study

Although GHRM has become an established research area, its application in higher education, and particularly in academic recruitment remains limited (Coelho et al., 2024; Cosenza et al., 2025). Existing studies point to a shortage of empirical evidence on how environmentally minded values influence candidate selection and recruitment processes, with organisational-level investigations into green recruiters' criteria and selection methods still rare, especially in universities (Renwick et al., 2013). In many cases, sustainability continues to be approached as an instrumental tool to enhance institutional reputation or financial returns, rather than a structural commitment embedded in organisational culture (Faeni et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013). This narrow framing risks overlooking social values, fairness, and long-term impacts that are essential for sustainable transformation (Wilkinson et al., 2001). A more meaningful approach involves developing a sustainability-oriented academic discourse that encourages reflexivity and inclusive dialogue among stakeholders, fostering an organisational consciousness capable of challenging assumptions and embracing multiple perspectives (Starkey & Crane, 2003; Renwick et al., 2013).

Institutional evidence from the University of Porto underscores the existence of this gap. The Social Report of 2024 (Universidade do Porto, 2025d) makes no explicit reference to sustainability, green recruitment, or HR development strategies, indicating an untapped opportunity for FEP to integrate sustainability as a strategic and educational value in

academic hiring. A systematic review of higher education strategies for the 2030 Agenda shows that human resource management is rarely considered a formal domain for advancing sustainability. While teaching, research, and operational governance often receive attention, recruitment. This omission limits the ability of institutions to link sustainability objectives in a coherent and strategic way (Fia et al., 2022; Leal Filho et al., 2021; Starkey & Crane, 2023).

At the meso-level, faculties and departments are underrepresented in sustainability literature (Faeni et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013). Yet, decisions at this scale directly shape curricular content, research agendas, and community engagement. Faculty hired under sustainability-aligned criteria are more likely to integrate SDGs into course design, conduct research on sustainable development, and build partnerships that advance sustainability objectives (Faeni et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013). Applying green recruitment at this level therefore offers a practical and targeted means of embedding sustainability into the core functions of the university (Faeni et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013; Fia et al., 2022; Starkey & Crane, 2023).

The scarcity of studies on GHRM activities such as green recruitment in non-corporate contexts further emphasises the novelty and value of exploring these practices in a higher education setting (Faeni et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013). This gap gains additional significance considering the growing prominence of sustainability metrics in global rankings. In 2025, the University of Porto ranked 209th in the QS Sustainability Ranking (Universidade do Porto, 2025a), with strong results in *Knowledge Exchange* (98.5%), *Impact of Education* (95.2%), and *Health and Well-Being* (93.4%). However, its score for *Environmental Sustainability* was significantly lower (49.8%), indicating a gap between institutional policies and their environmental integration. This gap is particularly relevant for faculty recruitment, which is not currently assessed in the ranking but directly influences these categories. Embedding sustainability into recruitment at FEP therefore represents a concrete strategy to address weaker areas while reinforcing institutional strengths.

Accordingly, this study examines the integration of sustainability into recruitment practices by addressing the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does FEP currently integrate sustainability-related criteria in academic recruitment?

- 2) How can the inclusion of green recruitment practices enhance the institution's sustainability performance and its standing in international rankings such as QS Sustainability?
- 3) What specific sustainability-based recruitment criterion could be designed and implemented at FEP to ensure that newly hired faculty contribute to sustainability integration in teaching, research, and institutional culture?

This research addresses a theoretical gap in the sustainable human resource management literature in higher education, responds to a practical policy gap by proposing a concrete sustainability criterion for academic recruitment at FEP, and positions this criterion as a dual-impact measure capable of reinforcing internal sustainability culture while enhancing the institution's external ranking performance (Coutinho, 2023).

Methodology

Methodological approach

This dissertation adopts a qualitative single-case study approach, focusing on FEP as a bounded system within the broader higher education context. The study is situated within the interpretive and socio-critical paradigms (Coutinho, 2023; Ridder, 2017), which emphasize understanding institutional practices in their real-world complexity while also recognising the potential of research to promote change (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Carter et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2019). The temporal frame for analysis covers the period 2015–2025, coinciding with the publication of the most recent recruitment regulations, institutional sustainability strategies, and curricular developments.

To ensure analytical robustness and credibility, the study applies methodological triangulation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Carter et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2019) combining:

- Document analysis of institutional and governmental sources, including recruitment regulations, sustainability strategies, governance reports, and legal provisions.
- Curricular review of 83 undergraduate courses across FEP's Economics and Business Administration programmes, systematically coded for the presence, type, and depth of sustainability-related content.
- International benchmarking of faculty recruitment practices in leading universities, such as Cornell University, Penn State Institute, RMIT University and University of Canterbury, using publicly available documentation and contextualised by performance in the QS Sustainability Ranking.

This approach provides a multi-perspective understanding of the phenomenon, enabling the formulation of a sustainability-based recruitment criterion that is both theoretically informed and practically applicable to higher education.

Methodological Phases

The research follows the four-phase model proposed by Rashid et al. (2019):

- Foundation phase: Identification of the absence of sustainability-related criteria in FEP's faculty recruitment processes and framing this gap within the literature on GHRM, with reference to theories such as the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity framework, Resource-Based View, and Social Exchange Theory.
- Prefield phase: Collection of institutional documents (recruitment regulations, sustainability reports, and strategic plans from FEP and University of Porto), as well as the retrieval of course syllabi for all 83 undergraduate curricular units. In addition, the selection of international universities with documented green recruitment practices for comparative benchmarking.
- Field phase: Thematic analysis of institutional documents to identify references to sustainability, recruitment, and HRM., followed by the coding of course syllabi, classifying sustainability presence, ESG type, and depth of coverage. This phase also included the review of international case studies, recording each institution's QS Sustainability Ranking position to contextualise maturity and external recognition.
- Reporting phase: Synthesis of findings across the three sources of evidence and therefore, the development of a proposal for a sustainability-based recruitment criterion with an associated valuation system, grounded in both internal evidence (documents and curriculum) and external benchmarking.

Research design

The design of this dissertation is anchored in the literature that faculty recruitment directly influences curricular orientation (Barth & Rieckmann, 2012; Brahm & Kühner; 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2025) and, by extension, the integration of sustainability into higher education. Accordingly, the unit of analysis is defined as the presence, absence, or potential for integration of sustainability-related criteria in FEP's academic recruitment processes. A secondary, pedagogical dimension is also considered, namely the extent to which these recruitment criteria can shape the inclusion of sustainability topics in the curriculum. The

curriculum review is therefore not pursued as a separate objective but as evidence of the broader pedagogical implications of faculty selection (Amorós et al., 2023; Filho et al., 2024).

Mapping the current distribution of sustainability content across curricular units provides empirical justification for the proposed recruitment criterion by revealing gaps that could be addressed through the strategic hiring of faculty with sustainability-related expertise. This link between recruitment and curriculum design is further supported by the *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária*³ which stipulates that academic staff are responsible for teaching, research, and activities aligned with institutional goals, while also granting universities autonomy to define selection criteria that reflect their strategic priorities. Consequently, the integration of sustainability into recruitment is both legally permissible and strategically coherent with institutional governance structures, ensuring that faculty hiring decisions can influence organisational culture as well as the pedagogical orientation of degree programmes.

Alignment with Theoretical Frameworks

The analytical dimension of this dissertation is guided by four complementary theoretical frameworks that together provide a multi-level perspective on the integration of sustainability into faculty recruitment.

Firstly, the AMO Theory (Bangwal et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2025; Renwick et al., 2013) is applied to examine how recruitment practices may enhance candidates' ability, motivation, and opportunity to contribute to sustainability objectives (Abbas et al., 2022; Bos-Nehles et al., 2023). Data from recruitment regulations and course syllabi are analysed to assess whether faculty hiring can strengthen candidates' *ability* through sustainability-related knowledge and skills, *motivation* by aligning personal values with institutional commitments, and *opportunity* through institutional support for the integration of sustainability into teaching and research (Abbas et al., 2022; Bos-Nehles et al., 2023).

Secondly, the RBV (Chowdhury et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2025) frames institutional policies and practices as potential strategic resources that can differentiate FEP in the competitive higher education landscape. By benchmarking against leading international universities, the

³ Portugal. (2019). *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (versão consolidada)* [Statute of the University Teaching Career (consolidated version)]. *Diário da República*. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1979-72873110>. Accessed August 4, 2025.

analysis considers whether sustainability-oriented recruitment constitutes a valuable, rare, inimitable, and organisationally embedded capability, thereby contributing to long-term competitive advantage (Bindeeba et al., 2025).

Thirdly, SET (Chowdhury et al., 2023; Faeni et al., 2025) provides insights into the relational dynamics between the university and its faculty. Thematic analysis of institutional documents highlights how commitments to sustainability create reciprocal expectations, whereby institutional recognition and support of sustainability-oriented practices foster pro-environmental behaviour among faculty members and consolidate a culture aligned with organisational and societal goals (Aboramadan, 2022).

Finally, the study is informed by Stakeholder Theory (Gharzeddine & Davies, 2025; Ribeiro & Gavronski, 2021), which emphasises that universities must address the expectations and needs of multiple internal and external actors (Aboramadan, 2022). In the context of faculty recruitment, relevant stakeholders include students, who benefit from sustainability-oriented curricula; policymakers and accreditation agencies, who expect alignment with national and international sustainability agendas; faculty members, who integrate sustainability into teaching and research; and society in general, which increasingly demands that universities contribute actively to sustainable development (Basheer et al., 2025; Wilson et al., 2023). Analysing recruitment practices through this lens underscores the role of sustainability-based criteria not only as an internal HRM mechanism but also as a response to broader stakeholder pressures and legitimacy requirements.

Together, these four frameworks ensure that the research design is both theoretically robust and empirically grounded, enabling the interpretation of recruitment practices as human resource mechanisms, strategic levers for institutional competitiveness, and instruments of accountability to stakeholders and society.

Data Collection Procedure

The analysis of data was carried out in a structured and systematic manner (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Rashid et al., 2019), ensuring that evidence from different sources could be compared, integrated, and interpreted consistently (Rashid et al., 2019). Institutional documents, including recruitment regulations, strategic plans, and sustainability reports, were analysed using thematic coding (Vaismoradi, 2013), with categories developed to capture references

to recruitment practices, sustainability-related competencies, and their alignment with institutional strategies and governance frameworks. This allowed the identification of both explicit and implicit opportunities for integrating sustainability into faculty selection criteria.

The curricular review of 83 syllabi was subjected to a content coding framework (*See Appendix 3 – Analysis of undergraduate courses: Economics; Appendix 4 – Analysis of undergraduate courses: Business Administration*) which classified each course according to four dimensions: the presence or absence of sustainability content, the degree of explicitness (implicit reference versus explicit mention), the ESG domain addressed, and the depth of coverage, ranging from introductory references to advanced or dedicated modules. The coding results were subsequently aggregated to highlight curricular patterns and gaps, providing empirical justification for the proposed recruitment criterion.

For the benchmarking part, recruitment and HR policies retrieved from international universities were analysed through comparative content analysis. Their positions in the QS Sustainability Ranking, along with relevant sub-indicators such as Education, Research, and Environmental Impact (*see Appendix 2 – Indicators of QS Sustainable Ranking*) were recorded to contextualise the maturity and visibility of their sustainability commitments. This process allowed for the identification of good practices while situating them within broader institutional performance.

Finally, results from the three analytical streams were consolidated through triangulation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Carter et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2019) enabling the convergence of evidence and ensuring that findings were not dependent on a single data source. Through this combined approach, the data analysis ensured both empirical rigour and theoretical alignment, allowing the study to generate findings that are grounded in multiple perspectives while also addressing the central research question (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Carter et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2019).

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in compliance with the ethical principles applicable to qualitative research in the social sciences, as outlined by Coutinho (2023) and Baxter and Jack (2008). Although the study relied primarily on publicly available documents, course syllabi, and institutional reports, ethical diligence was maintained to ensure the integrity,

accuracy, and responsible use of information (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Carter et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2019). All institutional documents, curricular materials, and international benchmarking sources were obtained from official and publicly accessible repositories, such as the University of Porto's SIGARRA platform, the *Diário da República* for government legislation, and the official websites of the benchmarked universities. This approach ensured that no confidential or restricted information was accessed. The academic literature review was conducted exclusively through recognised scientific databases, namely Scopus and Web of Science, to ensure that all sources met peer-reviewed quality standards. The selected studies were published in leading international journals such as *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *Human Resource Management*, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *Higher Education*, *Sustainability*, and *Discover Sustainability*, ensuring both scientific rigour and relevance to the research context. Proper referencing of these materials serves to respect intellectual property rights and maintain the traceability of the research process (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Coutinho, 2023; Carter et al., 2014). Given that the study did not involve human participants, no formal ethics approval from an institutional review board was required (Coutinho, 2023). The socio-critical paradigm underpinning this dissertation (Coutinho, 2023) also entails an ethical obligation to propose institutional improvements that promote fairness, sustainability, and inclusivity. Finally, the proposed sustainability-based recruitment criterion and valuation system were developed with careful consideration of their potential impact on academic staff and institutional governance. The intention is to ensure that the recommendations are constructive, context-appropriate, and capable of supporting the long-term strategic objectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Coutinho, 2023; Carter et al., 2014) of FEP without creating discriminatory or exclusionary practices.

Results

Document Analysis of Recruitment Regulations and Sustainability Policies

The documentary analysis examined statutes, governance reports, strategic plans, recruitment regulations, and ethical frameworks from UP and FEP, as well as ECDU⁴. These sources were analysed to assess the extent to which sustainability is formally integrated into recruitment and evaluation processes. The Statutes of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto confirm FEP's position as an organic unit of UP, endowed with statutory, scientific, pedagogical, administrative, and financial autonomy (Universidade do Porto, n.d.-c) This autonomy allows the school to define its pedagogical and administrative models while remaining institutionally aligned with the overarching mission and governance of UP. Similarly, the UP Statutes⁵ affirm the university's commitment to sustainable development, with Article 2 explicitly stating its aim to promote environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Both FEP and UP emphasise the social valorisation of knowledge, innovation, and responsibility, values that establish a strong institutional framework for sustainability in education and governance.

UP's mission and values further reinforce this orientation, highlighting commitments to sustainable environmental, economic, and social development, high ethical standards, and equal access and treatment irrespective of gender, social, political, ethnic, or religious differences (Universidade do Porto, n.d.-a). FEP's mission similarly underlines the school's responsibility in economics and management education, its role in shaping professional practices, and its explicit objective of adding social value to knowledge (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, n.d.-a). With over seven decades of national influence (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, n.d.-b), FEP's history and reputation position it as a leading institution in shaping future economic and managerial leadership, while also reinforcing its capacity to act as a reference in sustainable academic practices.

⁴ Portugal. (2019). *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (versão consolidada)* [Statute of the University Teaching Career (consolidated version)]. *Diário da República*. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1979-72873110>. Accessed August 4, 2025.

⁵ Universidade do Porto. (2015). *Estatutos da Universidade do Porto*. *Diário da República*, 2.^a série, n. °100, 25 de maio de 2015. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/despacho-normativo/8-2015-6725303>

Recent strategic and operational documents also underscore this institutional focus. UP Strategic Plan 2030 identifies sustainability as one of its five strategic axis, emphasising the integration of SDGs across teaching, research, and governance (Universidade do Porto, 2020). The University's 2024 Activity Plan (Universidade do Porto, 2025a) and the 2024 Activities Report (Universidade do Porto, 2024b) further highlights sustainability as transversal and strategic, with concrete actions in curriculum development, staff training, and governance. At faculty level, FEP has actively engaged in sustainability initiatives, including Scope 3 carbon emissions certification (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, n.d.-c) the establishment of a Sustainability Committee (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, n.d.-d), the launch of new elective courses on climate transition and corporate sustainability (Universidade do Porto, 2025b), and participation in awareness campaigns such as the Green Heart Certification (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, n.d.-e) and food waste reduction initiatives (Universidade do Porto, 2025c). These actions illustrate an institutional culture where sustainability is increasingly embedded in governance and operations.

The governance structure of FEP provides clear mechanisms through which recruitment criteria may be developed or amended. The Director holds executive authority to propose changes, while the Scientific Council is the body formally responsible for defining and approving recruitment and evaluation standards (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, n.d.-f). The Pedagogical Council influences teaching and evaluation practices, and the Representative Council may approve structural changes to internal regulations, if required (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, n.d.-g, n.d.-h, n.d.-i). Additionally, the Sustainability Committee serves as an advisory body, raising awareness, producing sustainability reports, and proposing initiatives aligned with the SDGs (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, 2024). Together, these governance instruments demonstrate that the faculty possesses the institutional capacity to incorporate sustainability dimensions into recruitment and evaluation processes within the existing statutory framework. Despite this strong institutional alignment with sustainability, the analysis of recruitment regulations and public notices reveals a gap between strategic commitments and formal evaluation criteria. Recruitment competitions at FEP follow the Statute of the University Teaching Career

(ECDU)⁶, which defines the categories of academic merit assessed during hiring: scientific merit, pedagogical competence, and other relevant activities. Internal regulations⁷ at UP further detail evaluation dimensions, such as scientific production, pedagogical innovation, community engagement, and university management. However, sustainability-related qualifications are not explicitly and publicly recognised in any of these dimensions. For example, in the 2022 internal promotion competition for five Associate Professors⁸ and the 2024 competition for a Full Professor in Economics⁹, candidates were evaluated on four weighted dimensions—Scientific Merit (60%), Teaching and Pedagogical Merit (25%), Knowledge Valorisation and Outreach (5%), and University Management (10%)—without reference to sustainability-related teaching, research, or service. Likewise, Regulation No. 470/2024¹⁰, which governs the evaluation of professors during their probationary period, defines assessment criteria across research, teaching, knowledge transfer, and management, but does not identify sustainability as an evaluative subdimension. Internal human resources instruments, including workload regulations (Universidade do Porto, n.d. -b.), evaluation forms (Universidade do Porto, n.d. -d.), and curricular performance reviews (Universidade do Porto, n.d. -e.), also demonstrate a structured and comprehensive framework for recruitment and academic staff management. While these instruments confirm the institution's ability to regulate academic work in detail, they likewise omit explicit recognition of sustainability-related contributions. Nevertheless, their flexibility in accommodating diverse pedagogical and research activities suggests that sustainability criteria could be integrated without requiring fundamental structural reform.

Overall, the document analysis indicates a strong institutional and strategic commitment to sustainability at both UP and FEP levels, supported by formal governance bodies and a wide

⁶ Portugal. (2019). *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (versão consolidada)* [Statute of the University Teaching Career (consolidated version)]. *Diário da República*. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1979-72873110>. Accessed August 4, 2025.

⁷ Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto. (2022). *Estatutos da Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto* (Despacho n.º 3008/2022, Diário da República, 2.ª série, n.º 49, 10 de março).

⁸ Universidade do Porto. (2022, May 16). Internal promotion competition for the appointment of five Associate Professors in the field of Economics at FEP – Public Notice no. 646/2022. *Diário da República*, 2.ª série, no. 94, 241–246. <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/edital/646-2022-185946181>

⁹ Universidade do Porto. (2024, 30 de setembro). Edital n.º 1456/2024: *Concurso documental para provimento de um professor catedrático para a área disciplinar de Economia da Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto*. *Diário da República*, 2.ª série, n.º 189. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/edital/1456-2024-889310853>

¹⁰ Regulation No. 470/2024, Regulation on the evaluation of activity during the probationary period for the purposes of retention of indefinite employment contracts of FEP professors, published in the *Diário da República* on April 26, 2024. Available at: <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/regulamento/470-2024-862906615>

range of operational initiatives. However, the recruitment and evaluation frameworks currently applied remain silent on sustainability as a formal criterion. This gap highlights a divergence between institutional values and governance practices, which is particularly relevant in the context of global rankings such as the QS Sustainability Ranking, where UP performs strongly in social and educational impact indicators but comparatively weaker in environmental sustainability.

Curricular Analysis of Undergraduate Courses in Economics and Management

The curricular review covered 83 undergraduate courses at FEP, comprising 42 in Economics (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, 2024a) and 41 in Business Administration (Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto, 2024b) (*See Appendix 3 - Analysis of undergraduate courses: Economics; Appendix 4 – Analysis of undergraduate courses: Business Administration*). Of these, 17 courses (20.5%) included sustainability-related content: 9 in Economics and 8 in Business Administration. A disciplinary breakdown by field is presented in *Table 1- Sustainability distribution across courses*

Field	Total	With Sustainability
Economics	28	6
Management Studies	30	6
Social Sciences	9	3
Mathematics	8	1
Legal Sciences	5	1
Computer Science	3	0
Total	83	17

Table 1- Sustainability distribution across courses

Source: Author's Elaboration

The data show that sustainability is most frequently integrated in Economics, Management Studies, and Social Sciences, while technical and quantitative fields such as Mathematics, Legal Sciences, and Computer Science present minimal or no coverage. The depth of integration across the 17 courses is uneven. Four courses provide only low coverage, where sustainability is mentioned superficially. Eight courses demonstrate medium coverage, integrating sustainability as one of several topics. Five courses offer high coverage, where sustainability is central to the syllabus. These higher-depth courses are concentrated in Social Sciences and Management, reflecting a more robust engagement in these areas compared to technical disciplines. The imbalance is particularly visible in Economics, where nearly half of the sustainability-related courses are optional, raising the possibility that some students may complete the degree without systematic exposure to sustainability.

A further imbalance appears in the year of study. In both Economics and Business Administration, most sustainability-related courses are concentrated in the third year, meaning that students are often only exposed to sustainability topics at an advanced stage of their degree. Regarding thematic orientation, most courses emphasise the social and environmental dimensions, while the governance dimension of sustainability is rarely addressed. None of the syllabi explicitly mention the SDGs, although several courses could be aligned with it.

Overall, the curricular analysis highlights an uneven and limited integration of sustainability across FEP's undergraduate programmes. While some areas, particularly Management and Social Sciences, demonstrate some coverage, sustainability remains marginal in more quantitative and technical courses, creating disciplinary imbalances and limiting its treatment as a transversal competence.

Benchmarking Analysis of International Faculty Recruitment Practices

The benchmarking analysis reviewed recruitment regulations and human resource policies from four international universities recognised for their engagement with sustainability and their visibility in global rankings: Cornell University (United States), Pennsylvania State University (United States), RMIT University (Australia), and the University of Canterbury (New Zealand). The purpose of this analysis was to identify the extent to which sustainability-

related competencies are explicitly incorporated into faculty recruitment and evaluation criteria, and to provide a comparative perspective on practices currently absent from FEP.

At Cornell University, sustainability is systematically embedded into human resource policies and faculty expectations. The university's *Skills for Success* competency integrates sustainability into several core competencies, requiring employees, including academic staff, to “*adopt a culture of sustainability and efficiency*” and to consider environmental, economic, and social impacts in decision-making (Cornell University, 2013). Cornell's Campus Sustainability Office further reports that “*100% of employees have sustainability as part of their job description.*” (Cornell University Campus Sustainability Office, n.d.). These measures illustrate that sustainability is not treated as optional, but as a universal requirement across all staff roles, including faculty positions. Cornell's leadership in this area is reflected in its strong international reputation, ranking 219th in the QS Sustainability Ranking (2025) (*see Appendix 2 – Indicators of QS Sustainable Ranking*).

At Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), the Sustainability Institute developed a *Recruitment and Hiring Guide* designed to help search committees embed sustainability into hiring practices (Pennsylvania State University Sustainability Institute, 2020). The guide recommends incorporating sustainability literacy into job descriptions and interview processes and suggests using sustainability as an additional filter to differentiate between equally qualified candidates (Pennsylvania State University, n.d.). While the application of these criteria may vary across departments, the existence of an official guide institutionalised sustainability considerations within faculty recruitment. Penn State ranked 19th in the QS Sustainability Ranking (2025) (*see Appendix 2 – Indicators of QS Sustainable Ranking*).

At RMIT University, sustainability is explicitly included in human resource policies. The university's *Sustainability Action Plan* requires human resources to incorporate sustainability into all new or revised position descriptions (RMIT University, 2021). Selection criteria are expected to reflect sustainability-related competencies, initially framed through sustainable procurement but extending to broader environmental and social responsibilities (RMIT University, n.d.). This ensures that sustainability considerations are embedded in the recruitment of academic staff and are treated as part of their professional obligations. RMIT's

comprehensive approach has contributed to its high performance in the QS Sustainability Ranking, where it placed 80th in 2025 (*see Appendix 2 – Indicators of QS Sustainable Ranking*).

At the University of Canterbury, sustainability is integrated into standard job descriptions through explicit HR templates (University of Canterbury n.d.-a). Academic staff are required to “*contribute to the sustainability efforts of the University through the responsible use of resources and equipment*” making sustainability a formal expectation of employment (University of Canterbury n.d. b). This requirement, embedded in official recruitment materials, ensures that all newly appointed faculty are aligned with the institution’s sustainability objectives from the outset. Canterbury’s alignment with the SDGs has supported a steady improvement in its international sustainability positioning, ranking 78th in the QS Sustainability Ranking (2025) (*see Appendix 2 – Indicators of QS Sustainable Ranking*).

Comparative findings show that all four institutions have incorporated sustainability into recruitment, either through university-wide competency frameworks (Cornell), formalised hiring guides (Penn State), HR policies (RMIT), or position description templates (Canterbury). While approaches vary in scope and specificity, they share the common feature of positioning sustainability as an explicit criterion for recruitment and professional evaluation. This stands in contrast to the current practices at FEP, where despite strategic commitments to sustainability, the public recruitment regulations currently exclude sustainability-related considerations.

Discussion

The current study aimed to examine the extent to which sustainability-related criteria are currently integrated into academic recruitment at FEP, and to explore how the adoption of green recruitment practices could enhance the institution's sustainability performance and its position in international rankings such as the QS Sustainability Rankings. Furthermore, it sought to design a specific sustainability-based recruitment criterion that could be implemented at FEP to ensure that newly hired faculty contribute to the integration of sustainability into teaching, research, and institutional culture.

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does FEP currently integrate sustainability-related criteria in academic recruitment?
- 2) How can the inclusion of green recruitment practices enhance the institution's sustainability performance and its standing in international rankings such as QS Sustainability?
- 3) What specific sustainability-based recruitment criterion could be designed and implemented at FEP to ensure that newly hired faculty contribute to sustainability integration in teaching, research, and institutional culture?

The contributions of this study are fourfold.

First, the findings show that, at present, sustainability is not explicitly included as a recruitment criterion in FEP's faculty selection processes, despite the university's engagement in multiple sustainability initiatives and international commitments. Current recruitment practices are primarily aligned with legal and regulatory frameworks governing academic hiring in Portugal, which do not mandate sustainability as a formal evaluation criterion. This confirms the need for internal policy innovation at faculty level to bridge the gap between sustainability commitments and recruitment procedures.

Second, and consistent with the expectations, the benchmarking analysis revealed that universities which embed sustainability into recruitment, either by requiring sustainability-related experience or by linking job roles to sustainability objectives, tend to score higher in QS Sustainability Ranking. The results also show that several QS indicators, amounting to a

potential combined weight of one third of the total ranking score, could be positively influenced by recruiting faculty with sustainability expertise. This is because sustainability-oriented faculty contribute directly to several areas measured by QS Sustainability Ranking (see *Appendix 5 – Categories, Lens and Indicators of QS Sustainability Ranking*) (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, n.d.-a; n.d.-b; n.d.-c; n.d.-d; n.d.-e; n.d.-f; n.d.-g, n.d.-h; n.d.-i). In the area of education (*EE3*), hiring faculty with sustainability expertise increases the likelihood of offering climate-related and sustainability-focused courses. In research (*ER1, ER3*), faculty aligned with the SDGs strengthen the production of sustainable research and can lead or support research centres dedicated to environmental challenges. In the environmental and social dimensions (*ES2, ES3, ES5; EO4, EO5*), academics engaged in sustainability networks and green-sector experience enhance the institution's membership in international groups, reinforce climate commitments, support student societies, foster partnerships with sustainable companies, and improve skills alignment with labour market trends. Equality indicators (*EQ5, EQ6*) are also strengthened, since embedding sustainability in recruitment improves institutional fairness and staff perceptions. Finally, faculty involvement in sustainability education and governance (*IE1, IE3, IE4; KE2, KE3; GG3, GG6, GG9*) boosts the impact of teaching and alumni outcomes, enhances community engagement, and improves transparency and trust in governance. Together, these contributions demonstrate that integrating sustainability criteria into recruitment generates both internal academic value and measurable external visibility in QS Sustainability Rankings, reinforcing FEP's competitive positioning (see *Appendix 5 – Categories, Lens and Indicators of QS Sustainability Ranking*) (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, n.d.-a; n.d.-b; n.d. c; n.d.-d; n.d.-e; n.d.-f; n.d.-g, n.d.-h, n.d.-i).

Third, this study proposes a detailed framework for operationalising sustainability in recruitment at FEP without requiring amendments to the general legal framework for academic hiring in Portugal. Sustainability-related achievements can be integrated as sub criteria within the existing evaluation domains:

Scientific Merit (VMC)

The following sub-areas illustrate how concrete sustainability-oriented actions can be integrated and rewarded.

- **Publications:** Under the sub-criterion of scientific production quality and impact, publications addressing sustainability challenges can be explicitly recognized. For example, articles published in high-ranking journals on topics such as climate economics, sustainable finance, or corporate social responsibility fit naturally within the existing scope of VMC. Publications in interdisciplinary journals (*Journal of Cleaner Production*, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *Nature Sustainability*) for example, demonstrate both scientific rigor and global relevance, thereby strengthening the candidate's research profile while aligning with international priorities (Amorós et al., 2023; Lozano et al., 2019). Committees could, therefore, award merit for candidates who publish in sustainability journals or whose work on ESG and SDG-related themes achieves significant citation impact.
- **Research projects and funding:** Another VMC sub-criterion concerns participation and leadership in scientific projects. Sustainability-oriented projects, such as Horizon Europe grants on energy transition (Jabbour et al., 2019), FCT-funded projects on climate economics (FCT; n.d.), or partnerships with industry to implement circular economy models (Jabbour et al., 2019). Securing competitive funding for sustainability research demonstrates both scientific leadership and societal relevance, enhancing the candidate's merit without deviating from the existing evaluative structure.
- **Research impact and dissemination:** VMC also accounts for broader scientific impact. Here, sustainability research provides clear examples of societal relevance, such as policy briefs cited by the European Commission, OECD, or Portuguese ministries in the context of green taxation, ESG regulation, or SDG monitoring. Participation as an expert in international forums similarly strengthens the case for merit under this dimension (Amorós, 2023; Filho et al., 2016). Disseminating sustainability research in public reports or technical documents not only extends the university's societal role but also aligns with the current emphasis on impact within VMC.

- **Supervision of thesis and capacity-building:** Supervising dissertations on sustainability themes, such as projects on carbon markets, sustainable business models, or ESG reporting, (Barth et al., 2012; Leal et al., 2025) fits within the sub-criterion of training new researchers. Recognizing sustainability-oriented supervision highlights the dual role of faculty in producing knowledge and fostering new generations of scholars aligned with FEP's institutional mission.
- **Scientific community involvement:** Finally, VMC also values participation in scientific networks, editorial boards, and conferences. Membership in editorial boards of sustainability journals, presenting at specialized conferences, or contributing to PRME working groups are all concrete actions that can be acknowledged (Chan & Hsieh, 2022; Lozano et al., 2019). Such activities reinforce institutional positioning in global sustainability dialogues while fulfilling the sub-criterion of international scientific participation.

In sum, sustainability-related outputs can be fully integrated into VMC's existing sub-criteria, allowing committees to value publications, projects, and networks in this area without changing the rules. This approach aligns faculty evaluation with FEP's sustainability commitments and global priorities, reinforcing the institutional mission

Teaching Experience and Pedagogical Merit (VEMP)

The following sub-areas illustrate how sustainability-oriented pedagogical actions can be integrated and rewarded.

- **Course development and curriculum design:** Developing or revising courses to integrate sustainability topics fits naturally here. In Economics, authors stress the inclusion of environmental externalities, green taxation, and sustainable macro policies (Tallgauer & Schank, 2023; Venkatesan, 2015). In Mathematics and Statistics, sustainability datasets and optimization models can enrich applied teaching (Vásquez et al., 2023). In Accounting and Management, integrating ESG reporting, circular economy concepts, and sustainability strategies is increasingly demanded (De Silva & Nilipour, 2024; Simmons et al., 2024). Legal studies can address environmental regulation and ecological taxation (Santos et al., 2024), Computing can employ

sustainability dashboards and CO₂/ESG data (Peters et al., 2024), while the Social Sciences can explore public policy, governance, and cultural sustainability (Tafese & Kopp, 2025; Franco et al., 2019).

- **Teaching methodologies:** VEMP rewards innovative approaches to pedagogy, and sustainability provides rich opportunities in this regard. Methods such as project-based learning on SDGs, simulations of carbon markets, role-play on environmental negotiations, or data-driven assignments using sustainability datasets (e.g., CO₂ emissions, green finance indicators) can be acknowledged as evidence of pedagogical excellence and innovation (Barth & Rieckmann, 2023; Lozano et al., 2015; Suklun et al., 2024).
- **Teaching materials and resources:** Another sub-criterion under VEMP concerns the quality of teaching resources. Producing sustainability-focused syllabi, case studies, textbooks, or digital tools (such as videos, dashboards, or online modules on ESG) directly contributes to this dimension (Filho et al., 2019; Simmons et al., 2024; Suklun et al., 2024)
- **Professional development:** Participation in training related to Education for Sustainable Development or green teaching practices can also be valued under VEMP. For example, attending courses on sustainability in education or workshops on integrating SDGs into curricula reflects commitment to continuous pedagogical improvement (Leal Filho et al., 2019; Sterling, 2010; UNESCO, 2017).

Overall, sustainability-oriented teaching practices can be integrated across VEMP's sub-criteria. Recruitment committees may thus value curricular innovation, pedagogical methods, teaching materials, and student supervision that embed sustainability themes. This interpretation strengthens FEP's mission of aligning education with global sustainability agendas, while respecting the existing evaluation framework.

Knowledge Valorization and Socioeconomic Impact (VTC)

The following sub-areas illustrate how sustainability-oriented outreach and engagement actions can be integrated and rewarded.

- **Community engagement:** Collaborating with local communities on environmental or social projects, such as awareness campaigns on recycling, energy efficiency, or

sustainable consumption, fits naturally under VTC. These activities demonstrate applied contributions to the SDGs and reinforce FEP's social responsibility mission. (Franco et al., 2019)

- **Industry and public sector collaboration:** Providing expert advice to companies, or public organizations on sustainable business models, ESG strategies, or climate policy reflects impactful knowledge transfer. Such collaborations link academic expertise to real-world sustainability challenges (Jabbour et al., 2019; Lozano et al., 2019).
- **Policy and societal impact:** Disseminating research findings to policymakers or contributing to public reports on the green economy, fiscal policy, or carbon neutrality highlights the societal relevance of academic work. These outputs directly support evidence-based decision-making in sustainability governance (Filho et al., 2019).
- **Extension and outreach programs:** Organizing workshops, executive education, or public lectures on financial literacy, green taxation, or corporate sustainability practices exemplifies how academic knowledge can be valorised for wider audiences, especially underserved groups (Filho et al., 2016; Ribeiro & Gavronski, 2021).

In summary, sustainability-oriented outreach and applied projects can be fully integrated into VTC's sub-criteria. Recruitment committees may thus value societal impact and knowledge transfer initiatives that align with SDGs and FEP's strategic commitments, reinforcing the school's contribution to responsible management education within the existing evaluation framework.

University Management and Governance (VGU)

The following sub-areas illustrate how sustainability-oriented service and leadership can be integrated and rewarded.

- **Committee and governance participation:** Involvement in sustainability-related committees, such as faculty green offices, ethics boards, or working groups on SDG integration, can be recognized as governance contributions. These roles demonstrate leadership aligned with institutional sustainability priorities (Basheer et al., 2025; Wilson et al., 2023).

- **Institutional initiatives:** Leading or participating in projects that reduce the environmental footprint of the university, such as campus carbon footprint assessments, energy transition plans, or food waste reduction campaigns, showcases direct contributions to the university's sustainable operations (Disterheft et al., 2015).
- **Certifications and reporting:** Supporting the institution in attaining certifications (e.g., GHG emissions audits, STARS, UI GreenMetric) or contributing to sustainability reports strengthens transparency and accountability. Faculty who leads or coordinates such initiatives provide clear evidence of governance in action (Chan & Hsieh, 2022).
- **Program coordination and strategic planning:** Embedding sustainability into program design, quality assurance processes, or faculty-level strategic plans reflects administrative leadership that aligns with the University of Porto's broader mission and ethical guidelines (Lozano et al., 2019).

Briefly, sustainability-related governance activities fit fully within VGU's sub-criteria. Recognizing them ensures that service to the university is measured not only by administrative participation, but also by contributions to its environmental and social performance. This interpretation reinforces the principle of good university citizenship, aligning governance with UP's values of fairness, responsibility, and sustainability, while respecting the current regulatory framework.

Finally, it is worth noting that these recommendations are consistent with previous research showing that human resource practices can act as key drivers of organisational sustainability transformation (Renwick et al., 2013). By embedding sustainability into recruitment, FEP can reinforce its role as a leader in education for sustainable development, create measurable impacts on institutional performance indicators, and enhance its international positioning in sustainability-focused rankings. This integration is summarised in the table below, which provides concrete examples of how sustainability can be embedded into the current evaluative framework.

Dimension	Sustainability-Oriented Criteria	Examples/Evidence
VMC – Scientific Merit (60%)	Publications on sustainability	Articles in Journal of Cleaner Production, Business Strategy and the Environment, Nature Sustainability
	Research projects & funding	Horizon Europe Projects; FCT; Industry partnerships on circular economy
	Research impact & dissemination	Policy briefs cited by OECD/Portuguese ministries, SDG monitoring; contributions to public reports
	Supervision of thesis	Dissertations on carbon markets, ESG reporting, sustainable business models
	Scientific community involvement	Editorial boards of sustainability journal; PRME groups; Sustainability-focused conferences
VEMP – Teaching & Pedagogical Merit (25%)	Curriculum development	Courses revised to be environmental economics, ESG reporting, sustainability strategies across disciplines
	Teaching methodologies	Project-based learning on SDGs; simulations of carbon markets; role-play in environmental negotiations
	Teaching materials	Sustainability-focused syllabi, textbooks, digital dashboards, CO ₂ /ESG cases studies
	Professional development	Training/workshops on Educations for Sustainable Development; UNESCO programs
VTC – Knowledge, Valorisation & Socioeconomic Impact (5%)	Community engagement	Recycling/energy awareness campaigns; sustainable consumption projects
	Industry & public sector collaboration	Consulting on ESG strategies, climate policies; partnerships with companies/municipalities
	Outreach & extension	Reports on government on green taxation, circular economy, carbon neutrality

VGU – University Management & Governance (10%)	Governance participation	Membership in sustainability committees, ethics boards, SDG working groups
	Institutional initiatives	Leading campus footprint assessments, food waste reduction, energy transition projects
	Certifications & reporting	Contribution to STARS, UI Green Metrics, GHG audits, sustainability reports
	Strategic planning	Integration of sustainability into program design, processes, and faculty-level strategies

Table 2 - Proposed framework for embedding sustainability into faculty recruitment at FEP, showing examples of evaluative sub-criteria and supporting evidence

Source: Author's Elaboration

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has several limitations that, while not diminishing its contributions, indicate areas for further exploration. First, the research relied on a single-case study of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto (FEP). Although this design provided depth and contextual richness, it limits the transferability of findings, as FEP's culture, governance, and sustainability commitments may not reflect those of other universities. Second, the study used only documentary and publicly available data. While this ensured transparency, it excluded primary perspectives from recruiters, faculty, and leadership, which could have provided deeper insights into motivations, perceptions, and potential resistance. However, this choice was not merely a limitation but also a deliberate methodological decision. Faculty recruitment in Portuguese public universities is highly regulated by the *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária* (ECDU)¹¹ and formalized through public notices and official evaluation criteria. Because of this, the most authoritative and relevant sources for examining recruitment processes are legal documents, institutional regulations, and official curricular materials. Relying on these official sources ensured reliability, transparency, and

¹¹ Portugal. (2019). *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (versão consolidada)* [Statute of the University Teaching Career (consolidated version)]. *Diário da República*. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1979-72873110>. Accessed August 4, 2025.

comparability, avoiding the risk of subjective evidence. This rationale strengthens the methodological coherence of the study and justifies the exclusive focus on documentary analysis.

In addition to methodological constraints, practical barriers must also be acknowledged. Even if sustainability criteria can be formally embedded into existing evaluation dimensions, implementation may encounter resistance from faculty members who perceive such changes as an additional burden or as diluting traditional measures of scientific excellence. Likewise, some regulatory rigidity imposed by national legislation may slow the adoption of sustainability-oriented criteria, as any adjustments must remain consistent with the ECDU⁶ and broader public sector rules. Furthermore, cultural inertia within academia, where long-established practices and values often take precedence over innovation, may create reluctance to embrace sustainability as a core evaluative principle. These barriers highlight that institutional change is not solely a technical matter of regulatory adjustment, but also a social and cultural process requiring dialogue, consensus, and gradual integration.

Future research should therefore aim to broaden scope and methods. Comparative studies across faculties or universities, both in Portugal and internationally, could reveal structural and cultural differences in how sustainability is incorporated into recruitment. Qualitative research with stakeholders such as recruiters, faculty members, and students would provide valuable perspectives on the feasibility and acceptance of green recruitment. In addition, exploring the role of external drivers including QS Sustainability, could clarify how international frameworks influence universities' willingness to embed sustainability in job descriptions and evaluation. Finally, longitudinal research could examine the impact of sustainability-based recruitment over time, for example, whether faculty hired under such criteria contribute measurably to teaching, research, community engagement, and institutional reputation.

Future research could examine faculty perspectives on why sustainability is not included or valued in recruitment. Interviews or focus groups might reveal whether academics are insufficiently sensitised to the topic, lack expertise, or regard such criteria as not relevant to their work. Likewise, discussions with faculty in management roles could clarify whether sustainability is perceived as irrelevant, non-traditional, or of limited institutional importance.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature on Green Human Resource Management in higher education by showing that sustainability-related competencies remain largely absent from faculty recruitment processes, despite the prominence of sustainability in institutional strategies and global rankings. This reinforces prior findings on the persistent policy–practice gap in universities (Coelho et al., 2024; Cosenza et al., 2025). It further advances research on strategic and sustainable HRM by demonstrating that GHRM principles, particularly green recruitment, can be conceptually aligned with existing governance frameworks, such as the *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (ECDU)*¹², and with performance metrics including QS Sustainability Ranking. By applying this perspective in a public university, the study extends the scope of GHRM beyond its traditional corporate focus to highly regulated academic settings.

A key finding is the absence of formal requirements ensuring that new faculty are prepared or motivated to integrate sustainability into teaching and research, despite the evident alignment between sustainability goals and academic roles. The study’s main theoretical contribution lies in proposing a sustainability-based recruitment criterion grounded in the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity theory, the Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, and Social Exchange Theory. Together, these perspectives explain how green recruitment can strengthen institutional capabilities, stakeholder legitimacy, and cultural transformation toward sustainability. Another contribution is the contextualisation of Green HRM in Portuguese higher education, showing that even within some constraints of national legislation, policy innovation and alignment with global benchmarks remain possible. This fills a gap in the literature, which often overlooks the interplay between regulation and HR practices in academia.

Finally, the study makes a methodological contribution by employing a qualitative single-case design within interpretive and socio-critical paradigms. This approach provides a nuanced

¹² Portugal. (2019). *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (versão consolidada)* [Statute of the University Teaching Career (consolidated version)]. *Diário da República*. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1979-72873110>. Accessed August 4, 2025.

exploration of policy–practice alignment and offers a transferable framework for analysing similar dynamics in other universities.

Managerial implications

A strength of the present research is that it adds empirical knowledge to the limited body of evidence on how sustainability-related competencies can be operationalised in faculty recruitment processes within higher education, particularly in public universities governed by strict legal frameworks.

To university leadership, the present study may support the development of internal recruitment guidelines and job description templates that explicitly value sustainability competencies, such as the ability to integrate sustainability into curriculum design, research projects, and community engagement. This alignment between institutional strategy and recruitment practice can enhance FEP's position in global sustainability rankings, improve its employer brand, and strengthen its long-term contribution to Sustainable Development Goals. To higher education policymakers, the findings corroborate the efforts to align recruitment regulations, such as ECDU¹³, with broader national and European sustainability agendas. By embedding sustainability criteria into public recruitment frameworks, policymakers can ensure that the academic workforce is better equipped to deliver on environmental, social, and governance commitments.

Finally, the findings have practical implications for faculty and recruiters. They showed that integrating sustainability-related requirements in selection processes can serve as a catalyst for cultural change, signalling institutional priorities to both current and prospective staff. This may encourage faculty to engage more actively in sustainability initiatives, embed these principles in their teaching and research, and contribute to the university's overall sustainability performance.

¹³ Portugal. (2019). *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (versão consolidada)* [Statute of the University Teaching Career (consolidated version)]. *Diário da República*. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1979-72873110>. Accessed August 4, 2025.

Conclusion

This study drew upon the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity Theory, the Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, and Social Exchange Theory, together with the literature on Green Human Resource Management, sustainable HRM, and higher education governance, to examine the feasibility and strategic value of introducing a sustainability-based criterion in faculty recruitment at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Porto. The research identified the absence of sustainability-related competencies in recruitment policies, assessed the alignment between institutional commitments and human resource practices, and proposed a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant framework for integrating sustainability into academic hiring.

The findings show that while sustainability is embedded in FEP's strategies, commitments, and ranking participation, it is not yet operationalised in recruitment processes. This gap represents a missed opportunity to strengthen competitive advantage, enhance stakeholder trust, and accelerate cultural transformation in teaching, research, and community engagement. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to propose a structured sustainability-based recruitment criterion in Portuguese higher education, extending GHRM scholarship into a highly regulated academic context.

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. It demonstrates how green recruitment can be aligned with existing governance structures such as the *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (ECDU)*¹⁴, and with global benchmarks like QS Sustainability Ranking. It also provides FEP leadership, policymakers, and recruiters with a concrete plan for embedding sustainability into hiring, showing that even within regulatory constraints, human resource practices can drive institutional change.

More broadly, the research underscores that education is central to the green transition. As the OECD (2025) notes, climate change is not only an environmental issue but also a direct threat to human capital. Investing in people through education empowers them to act for sustainability, shaping future generations of leaders and innovators. As Nelson Mandela

¹⁴ Portugal. (2019). *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária (versão consolidada)* [Statute of the University Teaching Career (consolidated version)]. *Diário da República*. <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1979-72873110>. Accessed August 4, 2025.

(1990, as cited in Oxford Reference) once said, *“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”* By valuing sustainability in the recruitment of faculty, universities ensure that these principles are embedded in curricula and research, while signalling to society that they are committed to being part of the solution.

In conclusion, integrating sustainability into faculty recruitment is both feasible and strategically valuable. The proposed criterion for FEP represents a small but significant step toward making sustainability a defining feature of academic excellence. If pursued with dedication, it can help build a more resilient, innovative, and socially responsible academic community that equips future generations to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world and to work collectively for a sustainable planet.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 - The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

Source: United Nations

SDGs	Goal	Description
SDG 1	No poverty	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
SDG 2	Zero Hunger	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
SDG 3	Good Health and Well-Being	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
SDG 4	Quality Education	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
SDG 5	Gender Equality	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
SDG 6	Clean Water and Sanitation	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
SDG 7	Affordable and Clean Energy	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

SDGs	Goal	Description
SDG 8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
SDG 9	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovations
SDG 10	Reduced Inequalities	Reduce inequality within and among countries
SDG 11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
SDG 12	Responsible Consumption and Production	Ensure sustainable consumptions and production patterns
SDG 13	Climate Action	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
SDG 14	Life Below Water	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
SDG 15	Life on Land	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
SDG 16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
SDG 17	Partnerships for the Goals	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Appendix 2 – Indicators of QS Sustainable Ranking

Source: QS Sustainable Ranking

HEI	Country	Environmental Impact			Social Impact					Governance	Overall Score	Rank
		Environmental Sustainability	Environmental Education	Environmental Research	Equality	Knowledge Exchange	Impact of Education	Employability & Opportunities	Health & Well-Being			
Pennsylvania State University	United States	80.4	95.2	97.6	95.4	97.5	84.7	98.2	96	95.8	95.6	19
University of Canterbury	New Zealand	79.3	96.2	94.2	91.8	74.4	91.4	76.8	88	88.4	88.6	78
RMIT University	Australia	55.7	82.9	91.8	99.3	88.5	91.6	89.9	97.2	98.2	88.3	80
University of Porto	Portugal	49.8	61.7	82.4	80.5	98.5	95.2	75.8	93.4	85.4	78.1	209
Cornell University	United States	53.4	81.9	82.4	82	88.2	85.6	99.6	76.1	38.8	77.6	219

Appendix 3 – Analysis of undergraduate courses: Economics

Source: SIGARRA

Degree	Year	Field	Name	Mandatory	Presence of Sustainability	Explicit /Implicit	Type (ESG)	Depth (1 – low, 3 – high)
Economics	1	Economics	Calculations and Financial Instruments	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	1	Management Studies	Introduction to Accounting	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	1	Social Science	Introduction to Social Sciences	Yes	Yes	Explicit	E+S	1
Economics	1	Mathematics	Mathematics I	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	1	Economics	Microeconomics I	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	1	Management Studies	Accounting and Financial Report	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	1	Computer Science	Informatic Management	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	1	Social Science	Economic History	Yes	Yes	Explicit	E+S	1
Economics	1	Mathematics	Mathematics II	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	1	Economics	Microeconomics II	Yes	No	-	-	-

Degree	Year	Field	Name	Mandatory	Presence of Sustainability	Explicit /Implicit	Type (ESG)	Depth (1 – low, 3 – high)
Economics	2	Management Studies	Marketing	Yes	Yes	Explicit	S+G	1
Economics	2	Economics	Economic and Public Finance	Yes	Yes	Implicit	E+S+G	1
Economics	2	Mathematics	Statistics I	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	2	Economics	Macroeconomics	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	2	Legal Science	Corporate Law and Law of Contracts	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	2	Economics	Economics and Industrial Organization	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	2	Management Studies	Accounting and Management Control	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	2	Management Studies	Financial Markets and Financial Investments	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	2	Mathematics	Statistics II	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	2	Economics	Macroeconomics II	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Economic Growth	Yes	Yes	Implicit	E	2

Degree	Year	Field	Name	Mandatory	Presence of Sustainability	Explicit /Implicit	Type (ESG)	Depth (1 – low, 3 – high)
Economics	3	Economics	Monetary Economics	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Econometrics	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Economics Seminar	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	International Trade	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Management Studies	Auditing	No	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Computer Science	Business Analytics	No	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Management Studies	Business Cases Analysis	No	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Social Science	Political Science	No	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Legal Science	Labour Law	No	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Social Economics	No	Yes	Explicit	E+S+G	3
Economics	3	Management Studies	Taxation	No	No	-	-	-

Degree	Year	Field	Name	Mandatory	Presence of Sustainability	Explicit /Implicit	Type (ESG)	Depth (1 – low, 3 – high)
Economics	3	Social Science	Markets for Culture	No	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Projects Evaluation	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Portuguese and European Economy	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Management Studies	Corporate Finance	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Social Science	History of Economic Thought	Yes	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Innovation Economics	No	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Economics of the Environment	No	Yes	Explicit	E+S	3
Economics	3	Economics	Human Resource Economics	No	Yes	Explicit	E+S	2
Economics	3	Economics	International Monetary Economics	No	No	-	-	-
Economics	3	Economics	Urban and Regional Economics	No	Yes	Explicit	E+S	2

Appendix 4 – Analysis of undergraduate courses: Business Administration

Source: SIGARRA

Degree	Year	Field	Name	Mandatory	Presence of Sustainability	Explicit /Implicit	Type (ESG)	Depth (1 – low, 3 – high)
Business Administration	1	Management Studies	Financial Mathematics	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	1	Legal Sciences	Corporate Law and Law of Contracts	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	1	Social Sciences	Organizations Sociology	Yes	Yes	Implicit	S+G	1
Business Administration	1	Mathematics	Mathematics I	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	1	Economics	Microeconomics I	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	1	Management Studies	Introduction to Accounting	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	1	Management Studies	Information Management	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	1	Management Studies	Organizational Behaviour	Yes	Yes	Implicit	S+G	2
Business Administration	1	Mathematics	Mathematics II	Yes	No	-	-	-

Degree	Year	Field	Name	Mandatory	Presence of Sustainability	Explicit /Implicit	Type (ESG)	Depth (1 – low, 3 – high)
Business Administration	1	Economics	Microeconomics II	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Management Studies	Accounting and Financial Report	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Management Studies	Management Accounting	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Mathematics	Statistics I	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Economics	Macroeconomics I	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Legal Sciences	Tax Law	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Management Studies	Personal and Social Skills I	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Management Studies	Management Control	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Management Studies	Operational Research	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Management Studies	Marketing	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Mathematics	Statistics II	Yes	No	-	-	-

Degree	Year	Field	Name	Mandatory	Presence of Sustainability	Explicit /Implicit	Type (ESG)	Depth (1 – low, 3 – high)
Business Administration	2	Economics	Macroeconomics II	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	2	Management Studies	Personal and Social Skills II	Yes	Yes	Explicit	S	2
Business Administration	3	Economics	Portuguese and European Economy	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Financial Markets	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Operations Management	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Human Resources Management	Yes	Yes	Explicit	S+G	3
Business Administration	3	Economics	Econometric Methods	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Auditing	No	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Computer Science	Business Analytics	No	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Business Cases Analysis	No	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Social Science	Political Science	No	No	-	-	-

Degree	Year	Field	Name	Mandatory	Presence of Sustainability	Explicit /Implicit	Type (ESG)	Depth (1 – low, 3 – high)
Business Administration	3	Legal Science	Labour Law	No	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Economics	Social Economics	Yes	Explicit	E+S+G	3	
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Taxation	No	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Social Science	Markets for Culture	No	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Corporate Strategy	Yes	Yes	Explicit	S+G	2
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Corporate Finance	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Capital Budgeting	Yes	No	-	-	-
Business Administration	3	Management Studies	Information Systems	Yes	Yes	Explicit	E+S+G	2
Business Administration	3	Social Science	Ethics and Social Responsibility	Yes	Yes	Explicit	S+G	3
Business Administration	3	Economics	International Trade	No	No	-	-	-

Appendix 5 – Categories, Lens and Indicators of QS Sustainability Ranking

Source: *QS Sustainability Ranking*

Category	Lens	Indicator	Weight
Environmental Impact	Environmental Education	EE1 – Academic Reputation in Earth & Environment	10%
		EE2 – Alumni Impact for Environmental Sustainability – Public and Third Sector	4%
		EE3 – Climate Science and/or Sustainability Courses	3%
	Environmental Research	ER1 – Research Impact on SDGs for Sustainable Research	9%
		ER2 – Sustainable Research National Statistics	1%
		ER3 – Research Center with Environmental Sustainability Focus	2%
		ER4 – Policy Citation (Environmental)	1%
	Environmental Sustainability	ES1 – Alumni Impact for Innovation	5%
		ES2 – Member of an officially recognised sustainable group	1%
		ES3 – Climate change commitment (staff perception)	2%
		ES4 – Publicly available strategy or policy on sustainable procurement and investment	1%
		ES5 – Student Society focused on Environmental Sustainability	1%
		ES6 – Net Zero Commitment	1%
		ES7 – Emissions Efficiency	1%
		ES8 – Renewables Generated Onsite	1%
		ES9 – Progress Towards Target	1%
		ES10 – Policy on Climate Strategy	1%

Category	Lens	Indicator	Weight
Social Impact	Employability and Opportunities	EO1 – Employer Reputation	3%
		EO2 – Research Impact on SDGs for Employment and Opportunities	4%
		EO3 – Employment and Opportunities	1%
		EO4 – Partnerships with Industry	2%
		EO5 – Skills Satisfaction	1%
	Equality	EQ1 – Research Impact on SDGs for Equality	4%
		EQ2 – Student Gender Ratio	1%
		EQ3 – Faculty Gender Ratio	1%
		EQ4 – Women in Leadership Ratio	1%
		EQ5 – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy	1%
		EQ6 – Academic Equality (Staff View)	2%
		EQ7 – Disability Support	1%
		EQ8 – Equality National Statistics	1%
	Health and Well Being	HW1 – Research Impact on SDGs for Health and Wellbeing	3%
		HW2 – Health Provision on Campus	1%
		HW3 – Health and Well Being National Statistics	1%
	Impact on Education	IE1 – Research Impact on SDGs for Education	3%
		IE2 – Academic Reputation for Impact on Education	1%
		IE3 – Alumni Impact for Education	1%
		IE4 – Academic Freedom Index	1%
		IE5 – Impact on Education National Statistics	1%
	Knowledge Exchange	KE1 – Knowledge Exchange: Progress / Dissemination	6%
		KE2 – Outreach and Community Engagement	1%

		KE3 – Staff perception	2%
		KE4 – Policy Citations (Social)	1%

Category	Lens	Indicator	Weight
Governance	Good Governance	GG1 – Ethics Culture	1%
		GG2 – Open-Access Publishing	1%
		GG3 – Dedicated Staff/Team for Sustainable Development	1%
		GG4 – Transparent financial Reporting	1%
		GG5 – Student’s Union	1%
		GG6 – Student Representation in Governance	1%
		GG7 – Published governance minutes	1%
		GG8 – National Signatory to UN charter against torture	1%
		GG9 – Staff perception	1%
		GG10 – Policy Citations (Governance)	1%