UK feedback on the UN system-wide strategy for water and sanitation:

The world is facing an urgent water crisis exacerbated by climate change. At the heart of this crisis is weak governance and a lack of meaningful integration of water throughout relevant sectoral policies, strategies and programmes. To address this, we need a shift in the global system – that drives water up the agenda, reforms weak governance systems, embeds water resource management through multisectoral nexus approaches, and enables the right environment for large scale financing for water to flow.

The UN has a key role in delivering this ambition, and a forward thinking, ambitious and collaborative UN System-wide Strategy on Water and Sanitation is critical. Not only can such a strategy strengthen the coordination amongst UN agencies and their existing work on water, but also in setting out how UN entities, working in support of Government leadership and working in collaboration with other development partners, will remove the fundamental bottlenecks which are impeding progress and responds to the major global challenges – e.g. climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, rapid urbanisation and persistent inequalities. In order for such a strategy to be impactful it will need to be action oriented – focussing on what the UN will do, not just can do, and most importantly will need the endorsement of the highest levels from within the UN system.

Overall, the UK is positive of the UN SWS initial draft and supports the presented approach. We thank UN water and all the consulted agencies for their efforts so far. The draft contains many strong elements and the 14 outputs provide a strong baseline and should remain at the core of the document. Whilst we note that system-wide strategies are internal documents of the UN System and there is no mandate for UN Water to open this up for direct inputs from Member States, we would like to offer the following high-level comments as general remarks:

- The UK is particularly supportive of improving the policy coherence through the UN system to support integration across sectors and mainstreaming across inter-governmental processes.
- We welcome the goal of the SWS to enhance UN system-wide coordination and delivery of water-related priorities in support of countries to accelerate progress on national plans and priorities.
- We note the vision statement has lost the direct reference to benefitting “people and planet alike”. Given the inextricable links with climate, environment and nature, the vision statement would benefit from reintegrating the planetary benefits into the text (in line the SG’s vision set out during the UN Water Conference).
- Lastly, we note the use of the language “reinforcing water's place as a fundamental human right”, and would like to note that whilst there is a human right to water and sanitation, this is as a component of the human right to an adequate standard of living (first agreed in the Universal
Declaration of human rights (article 25(1)) and enshrined in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), and is not a standalone right(s). We are also cautious of any human rights being labelled as fundamental, which suggests there is a hierarchy contrary to the Vienna declaration and programme of action that “All human rights are universal, indivisible, and interdependent and interrelated”, which is not what is intended through this text.