

Sustainability Policy

Approved: Sept-25 | Review: Sept-27



Introduction

Open SU recognises the urgent nature of our changing climate which impacts the environment, people and their living conditions, non-human animals and wildlife, the economy and poverty levels. We see the need to act swiftly to respond to the impact of global warming and reduce its acceleration through our organisation's practices and education.

We commit to working to reduce the negative environmental impact of our activities while also making socially and economically sustainable choices across our organisation. We will take every opportunity to have a positive impact through harnessing student voice to advocate for change and encouraging positive collective and individual action.

We aim to create an equitable policy which is implemented in a socially, environmentally and financially responsible manner. We are committed to ensuring this policy does not adversely affect those who are already impeded by barriers to their engagement. For example, if someone needs to travel by car to an in-person face-to-face event, we would not want them to feel unable to attend because of sustainability considerations.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Define sustainability at Open SU.
- Set out our principles in relation to environmental, economic and social sustainability.
- Identify our objectives for action within this area.
- Share responsibilities, other relevant policies, and plans for monitoring and review.

Definition

Our definition of sustainability is based on John Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (1994) which states that an organisation is only sustainable when it focuses on the following three areas in combination: people, planet and prosperity. Actions taken in these areas interrelate and move us further towards social, economic and environmental sustainability as part of a more holistic approach.

Sustainability at Open SU means we will undertake our mission to improve the OU student experience whilst ensuring the organisation is in the best possible position to achieve that mission for future generations of students. It means we will use the Earth's resources in a responsible way to minimise negative impact and will empower the student voice to influence decision making throughout the University.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all activities of Open SU across all our work streams. This includes the Board of Trustees, Student Leadership Team, volunteers and staff within Open SU and the OU Student Shop.

Principles

- Our organisation acknowledges the challenges of living sustainably.
- We recognise that balance is needed in all things – particularly when considering sustainability at Open SU and within the University. For example, acknowledging accessibility needs for students, we know that many need or prefer printed books to study and we know that in-person meetings and events are often important for building relationships.
- We seek to encourage and empower through positive actions – never through shame or judgement and we want to highlight that small actions can make a big difference.
- We want to ensure that Open SU is fit for future generations of students and is inclusive of all.
- We will help colleagues influence the University to incorporate education for sustainable development into modules across the formal curriculum. This contributes to decarbonising education which aims to raise the consciousness of students around sustainability challenges and our carbon-intensive economy; encompassing environmental, social and economic factors.
- We will be transparent with students and OU colleagues, encouraging the University to do the same.
- We will collaborate with other institutions and their student unions/associations.
- We will take an intersectional approach to our campaigning, acknowledging the multiple factors which can impact how a student is affected by climate change, and what sustainable choices they can make.

Objectives

In line with our organisational values, Open SU makes the following commitments relating to environmental sustainability:

Impact

- Open SU will measure and track the environmental impact of its activities following a baseline impact assessment in 2025.
- Open SU will aim to reduce carbon emissions from meetings, events, giveaways, The Shop, transport and waste by testing more sustainable alternatives. As mentioned above, it is important to balance the benefits of having in-person events with their carbon impact.
- Open SU will consider the environmental impact of all activities through completion of Environmental Impact Assessments.

Engagement

- Open SU will collaborate with stakeholders, including colleagues within the University, to maximise the positive impact of our work in this area.
- To empower and engage students in our sustainability work.
- To provide opportunities to listen to the student voice and take action based on student feedback. We will ensure decisions and actions are informed by what students want to see.
- Open SU will provide opportunities for students to engage on topics relating to sustainability through online articles, events and volunteering opportunities.
- Open SU will make an ongoing effort to provide accessible learning opportunities to increase students' and staff's knowledge.

The Open University

- Open SU will campaign and advocate on behalf of OU students, for positive environmental action from the University. This includes achieving the University's net zero goals.
- Through the Environment and Sustainability Working Group, Open SU will take up opportunities to share the student voice through the appropriate channels within the University and advocate for increased student access to decision making.
- Open SU, through the Working Group, will create and disseminate position statements where appropriate.
- The Working Group will work with university colleagues and students to push for the implementation of education for sustainable development across the formal, informal and subliminal curriculum.

Responsibilities

Responsibility for this Policy sits with the Environment and Sustainability Working Group, as delegated by the Student Leadership Team and Board of Trustees. The Working Group will report back to the Student Leadership Team at least once every six months informally on the progress it has made. A written update will be provided annually.

The Environment and Sustainability Working Group Co-Chairs, one Student Leadership Team member and one staff member, have joint responsibility for monitoring and updating this policy.

Linked Policies

[Travel and Subsistence Policy](#)

Hybrid Working Policy, within Staff Handbook

Monitoring and Review

This Policy will be monitored through the Environment and Sustainability Working group.

This Policy will be reviewed and updated by the Working Group every two years for approval by the Student Leadership Team and Board of Trustees.