



Environmental Sustainability Policy

Estates / June 2026

Environmental Sustainability Policy

Introduction

The Open University (OU) is committed to developing a sustainable estate by reducing the negative environmental impacts of our activities and enhancing the positive impacts. We will prevent pollution and continually improve environmental performance through effective and appropriate management practices.

The purpose of this Environmental Policy is to:

- Identify, manage, monitor and reduce University activities that create negative environmental impacts
- Reduce the consumption of energy, water, and raw materials
- Help to provide a better environment for future generations
- Affirm the University's commitment to Environmental Sustainability to staff, students, and visitors
- Embed Environmental Sustainability principles in the development of future estate strategy and plans.

Scope

The OU operates sites across the four nations, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Environmental Sustainability Policy applies to all OU sites.

Objectives

Through the implementation of this policy, the University commits to:

Net Zero Carbon by 2030 for scope 1 and 2 emissions

- Retrofit and optimise buildings to improve building performance and reduce energy and carbon emissions by 10% by 2030
- Improve space utilisation, energy and resource efficiency through rationalising the estate to better reflect new hybrid working practices

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Effective from: June 2026	Date of next review: June 2027

- Decarbonisation of heat systems and infrastructure to electric or zero carbon technologies by 2030
- Increase onsite renewable energy generation by 2030
- Feasibility study for large scale renewable energy park at Walton Hall campus.
- Purchase of 100% electricity from renewable sources by 2030

Water efficiency

- Reduce water consumption (per m²) by 5% by 2028 from 2019–20 baseline
- Expand water metering
- Increase recycled water systems.

Sustainable construction

- Embed sustainable construction policy to new builds, retrofits, minor works, and estate maintenance works.
- New Building projects to integrate whole life cycle carbon assessment to set carbon targets across all life cycle stages of the project
- All new builds will target Net Zero Carbon 2030 requirements for embodied and operational carbon following LETI Climate Emergency Design Guide
- Major refurbishments will target LETI Best Practice Retrofit energy targets where appropriate
- All large refurbishments and maintenance works to incorporate energy and water efficiency measures to support Net Zero and Water commitments
- Create a climate resilient University through the development and implementation of Climate Change Adaptation plans for buildings, infrastructure and grounds.

Waste and resource management

- Maintain zero waste to landfill
- Increase recycling rate to 90% by 2028
- Eliminate avoidable single use plastic by 2030

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- Work with our suppliers to adopt circular economy principles.

Sustainable Procurement

- Embed sustainability into all procurement, using Sustainability Impact assessments
- Work with our suppliers and encourage them to sign up to the Sustain Supply Chain Code of Conduct (requires suppliers to acknowledge the Global Climate and Ecological Emergency) and NETpositive Futures (requires suppliers have sustainability action plans in place)

Sustainable food and catering

- Commit to sustainable and ethical sourcing of food
- Increase sustainable / plant-based dishes
- Reduce ruminant meat offering
- Limit food waste to 3% by 2024

Biodiversity

- Plan and manage our grounds and gardens activities to avoid loss and where possible increase biodiversity
- Collect and use significant biodiversity information, to inform planning and operational activities
- When undertaking projects endeavour to avoid damaging wild species and their habitats and, where appropriate, create opportunities for biodiversity enhancement
- Water sensitive landscape design where appropriate
- Promote green roofs

Sustainable Transport

- Transition OU fleet vehicles to electric and plug-in hybrids, except for heavy vehicles
- Invest in EV charging infrastructure at all OU sites
- Invest in active transport infrastructure including, bike parking, electric bike charging, secure bike parking, lockers and changing room

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- Implementation of sustainable travel plan across the locations and nations by 2030

Compliance

- Meet all relevant legal and legislative requirements relating to environmental sustainability and other compliance obligations

Engagement and culture change

We will raise awareness of environmental sustainability and embed sustainable behaviours through:

Carbon Literacy

- Educate staff and students on climate change and climate impacts by offering carbon literacy course to enable individual and collective actions on climate change

Sustainability, Planning, Action & Reporting Kit (SPARK)

- SPARK is a bespoke sustainability action plan tailored to each department's processes to support our transition to Net Zero.
- Implementation of SPARK 2023 – 2028

Go Green

- Go Green is a staff and student communication and engagement program to raise awareness, engage and embed sustainable behaviours at work and home
- Launch of the Go Green drop-in centre to showcase sustainability initiatives and activities across the University

Education for sustainable development

Our commitment to environmental and social sustainability will continue to run through our education, research, enterprise, curriculum, and public engagement work. By 2027 we will:

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- provide training and development to upskill and reskill colleagues on sustainability, including identifying social and wellbeing aspects of sustainability and contributing to system change.
- continue to advance learning, skills development and action in support of sustainability by developing and promoting curriculum, including open courses and micro credentials, for individuals, employers and communities.

Key Achievements

Engagement and Culture Change

- Achieved Bronze accreditation from Carbon Literacy Project
- 648 Carbon Literacy Certificates issued
- Re-launched quarterly Go Green Newsletter

Fleet Management

- The OU has reduced from 20 fleet vehicles to 12 vehicles in June 2026
- Electrified 80% of fleet vehicles
- Introduced EV charging at all OU Nations and sites

Biodiversity

- Achieved silver accreditation from Hedge friendly campus scheme
- Introduced campus Biodiversity Tour
- Launched a research-led Living Roof – Live Lab project at Stuart Hall roof to test and collect data on different soils and plants to measure benefits like improved biodiversity, reduced heat, and better water management in UK conditions.

Linked policies

Policies, strategies and plans linked to the Environmental Sustainability policy include:

- Net Zero Carbon 2030 Policy and Plan
- Waste and Resource Policy and Management Plan
- Water Policy

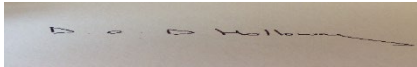
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- Sustainable Construction Policy
- Sustainable Food and Catering Policy
- Biodiversity Policy and Plan
- OU Responsible Procurement Strategy

Monitoring and review

The Environmental Sustainability Policy is owned by OU Estates. The policy will be reviewed annually, targets and consumption reported to the OU Executive Sustainability Steering committee.

Signed By



Dorian Holloway, Director of Estates

Version History

Version Number	Date of change	Originator of change (title)	Description of change
1.0	May 2023	Energy Manager	New Environmental Sustainability Policy
1.1	June 2024	Energy Manager	Reviewed – no change
1.2	June 2025	Energy Manager	Reviewed – no change
1.3	June 2026	Energy Manager	Reviewed – added key achievements

Next review: June 2027

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