



Sustainable Food Policy

Estates / June 2025

Sustainable food policy

Introduction

The Open University strives to provide students, staff and visitors with a healthy, high quality, value for money sustainable food service. With a significant proportion of greenhouse gases being attributed to the food system/chain, along with the University's target to reach net zero greenhouse emissions no later than 2050, sustainability is at the heart of catering's ethos.

Targets and objectives

A multi-faceted approach has been adopted to ensure the sustainable use of the planet's resources; key focus areas are:

- Promote ethical sourcing and supply chain
- Sustainable catering operations
- Source local and seasonal UK products where possible
- Increase sustainable / plant-based dishes
- Healthy and nutritious food options
- Effective management of food waste 3%
- Eliminate avoidable single use plastic items by 2030
- Comply with all relevant food handling and waste legislation

Scope

The policy covers all retail outlets and hospitality services across Walton Hall campus.

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Sustainable food plan

The OU has built a long-term relationship with its catering contractor whose environmental commitments are aligned with the University's Sustainability targets.

Purchasing

The catering contract will:

- Buy local and in season UK food where possible to reduce food miles and support local communities
- Purchase higher animal welfare meat: Red Tractor Accredited
- Use only free range eggs
- Buy British fresh milk from British dairy farms.
- Use sustainably sourced fish, excluding fish species identified as most at risk by MCS Marine Conservation Society. Tuna: only use pole caught tuna which ensures no other species are harmed
- Hold the Soil Association Food for Life award.
- Coffee, we use a supplier who supports local and national communities impacted by homelessness and mental health issues.
- Ensure our caterer signs up to our Modern Slavery policy
- Pay the catering team as a minimum at the Real Living Wage rates

Sustainable catering operations

- Energy efficiency - The main catering facility (Hub) operates using energy efficient induction cooking, ventilation, LED lighting systems and has roof top solar panels to reduce energy demand
- Water: water refill stations are available at all catering outlets to promote reusable water bottles
- Reduce Food Waste: to 3%, by effective production planning including portion control to ensure minimal waste is produced during food production process. During 2023/24 achieved average 1.53%.
- Discount fast-track sales of short life perishable items, with unsold food at the end of the day being offered free to staff and students to prevent items being treated as waste.
- Menu planning: provide customers with choice, continue to promote sustainable plant-based dishes by holding pop up events, including Veganuary.

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- Environmentally friendly cleaning products: in 2025 80%+ of all chemicals used are eco-friendly.
- Staff training: ensure the contractors team have received 'Green Flash' training, contractor's bespoke sustainability training.
- Key members of the estates & contractors catering team have completed Carbon Literacy training.
- Carbon labelling of foods, in 2024 pre packaged sandwiches included a carbon code, in 2025 the trialling of labelling of hot entrees began.
- Manage and reduce the numbers of deliveries per week.
- Support local community food bank, with OU staff and students encouraged to bring in donations
- Trialling of fixed weekly menu launched in March 2025, to identify sustainability benefits and efficiencies.

Waste and recycling

- Energy from Waste: Unavoidable waste & other pantry kitchen waste is sent to an anaerobic digestion facility for processing into bioenergy.
- Oil recycling: Waste oil is recycled into biodiesel.
- Specialist bins for recycling coffee cups coffee pods, food waste & batteries are located across campus.

Hospitality

- Approximately 50% of our hospitality menus are plant / vegetarian-based options.
- Promotion of bottled tap water and provision of glasses

Eliminate single use plastic items

- Drinking straws have been withdrawn from counters and available by request. We only use paper straws.
- Introduction of wooden cutlery
- Use of ceramic cups at the Hub and cafes
- Promote reusable takeaway cups, and water bottles

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- Engage stakeholders to identify the most sustainable reusable system which will allow customers to take food away, and the caterer to operate effectively.
- Research most sustainable bottled / canned drink materials
- Run cracker less Christmas events
- Replaced plastic disposable cups with reusable glasses
- Wherever possible buy milk in bulk pergal packs, reducing the number of plastic milk bottles used

Health & nutrition

- The calorific value of foods is available throughout the outlets at all point-of-sale areas.
- Potatoes and vegetables are cooked without the addition of salt

Communications

Catering website, ensures that consumers are well informed of the food provenance and best sustainable food practices.

Customer newsletter was launched in 2024

QR code customer feedback, reporting through to Estates Leadership team

Linked policies

Policies, strategies and plans linked to the Waste and Recycling policy include:

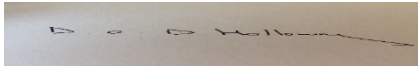
- Waste and Resource Management Policy and Plan
- Net Zero Carbon 2030 Policy and Plan
- Environmental Sustainability policy
- Biodiversity policy
- Sustainable construction policy

Monitoring and review

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

Signed By

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Dorian Holloway, Director of Estates

Version History

Version Number	Date of change	Originator of change (title)	Description of change
1.0	May 2023	Catering and Cleaning Contracts Manager	New Sustainable Food Policy
1.1	June 2024	Catering and Cleaning Contracts Manager	Launch of carbon labelling of foods Work with local food bank
1.2	June 2025	Catering and Cleaning Contracts Manager	Introduction of fixed daily menu

Next review date: June 2026

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