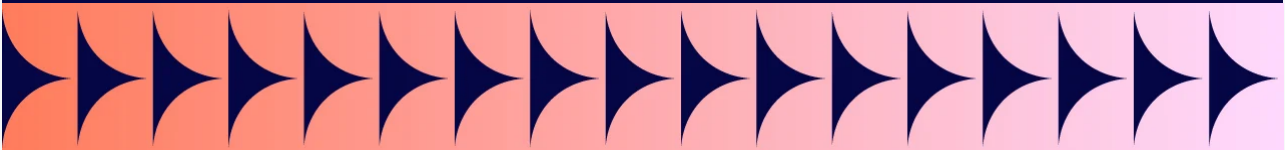


Welcome to this month's Sustainability Bulletin

March 2025



“Alas, poor Yorick! ...”

I found myself talking to a skull a few days ago, as a means of ‘debugging’ a program. That took me to Hamlet’s words in the title, which he speaks in a graveyard to the skull of his father’s jester. Shakespeare’s narrative might be read as an incidental account of reuse (of a burial ground) and recycling (of mortal remains). Reuse and recycling were also in my mind last weekend while I took part in a

community litter-pick: no skulls, but many bagfuls of empty cans and a rich variety of end-of-life plastics.



I am told that an approach to debugging code that is recommended by some computer programmers is to explain to a rubber duck, using ordinary words, what the program code is doing, line by line. It's called "rubber duck debugging". Though it's made of PVC rather than rubber, and it may not actually need to be a duck - I managed quite well with an OpenSTEM Labs skull and I am probably doing something similar when I talk through the challenges of the day ahead to my dog, Maizey, during our morning walk.

I am now wondering if the ducks washed overboard in the North Pacific from a container-ship in 1992 were part of a consignment intended for programmers. Though denied the chance to assist with debugging, 28,800 children's bath-toys ultimately contributed to science by tracing out global ocean currents, turning up many years later on coastlines bordering the Atlantic, the East China Sea and the South Pacific. Marine pollution with plastics comes not just from lost containers but also from improper recycling (or at least disposal) on land. The lost container-load of ducks turned out to be useful as a one-off test pollution-source, well-defined in place and time, with easily traceable markers. There is now a virtual reconstruction in which you can [set adrift](#) a raft of virtual ducks anywhere in the major oceans and follow their dispersal.

That got me wondering about the carbon footprint of PVC ducks. Initial estimates based on mass production overseas, transportation and individual delivery suggest about 130 g CO₂ equivalent per duck. I estimate that the web-print of a virtual duck (or skull) reached through a browser would have a lesser impact (than a single duck) for up to 70 page views ... and let's not lose sight of the adverse impact of the plastic waste from any end-of-life PVC ducks.

Speaking of the things coming to an end, my stewardship of the Sustainability Office comes to an end on 11 April, which will be my last day at the OU. It has been a privilege to work closely with Victoria, Gabriella and all the sustainability co-ordination group, helping to raise our game as an organisation on a journey to Net Zero (and beyond), and helping us be a trusted educator on environmental (and social) sustainability. I offer to all concerned my thanks for a journey shared and my best wishes for your onward journey to a more sustainable future.

Keep up the good work,

News, resources & engagement opportunities

The OU / BBC Radio series returns

Co-produced by The Open University, [Rare Earth](#) returns with Tom Heap and Helen Czerski to tackle the biggest environmental stories and explore bold solutions. The new series covers topics such as the Arctic's mineral rush, ozone recovery, Europe's wolves, deep-sea mining, and the future of shipping.

Visit our Broadcast and Partnerships website [OU Connect](#) where you can discover more about our environment and explore what we can do to help, as well as better understand the how you can be a more mindful consumer and consider sustainability. This radio series was commissioned by [Broadcast and Partnerships](#) and is supported by the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, with particular relevance to [R58 BSc Biology](#), [Q52 BSc Environmental Science](#) and [Q61 BSc/BA Design and Innovation](#).

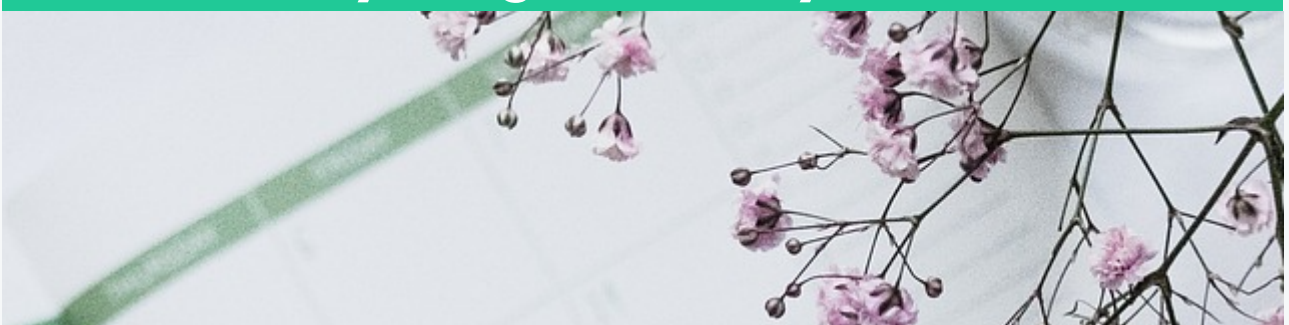
- Commissioned by Dr Caroline Ogilvie, Head of Broadcast & Partnerships
- Academic Consultants – Dr Kadmiel Maseyk, Dr Emma Dewberry, Dr Simon Collinson Taylor and Dr Martin Braun
- Media Fellows – Prof. Andrew Norton
- Broadcast Project Manager – Jo Shipp
- Digital Content Producer – Xinmiao Zhang



Simpler recycling legislation in England – what you need to know

EAUC held an [online event](#) on [Simpler recycling: workplace recycling in England](#). At the event, a representative from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs explained what the new legislation will mean for organisations such as The OU when it comes to separating dry recyclables, food waste and black bin waste from 31 March 2025. The new legislation is part of a government move to help it achieve its Net Zero target by asking businesses to present their waste for collection in the same way that households do.

Dates for your green diary



Digital Clean Up Week 2025 : 10 March – 17 March

This week marks the OU's first [Digital Clean Up Week](#), an initiative in collaboration with units across The OU. With the aim of reducing our digital carbon emissions, this is the perfect opportunity to get involved and show that sustainability is everyone's job! Every action supports our institutional goal on Sustainability (see [the OU Learn & Live Strategy](#)). The week will feature drop-in sessions and best practice guides on document sharing along with other take-away tips for easy daily habits to reduce our carbon emissions.

Go Green – Cultivating good digital habits: 12 March, 2.30–3.15pm

The OU in Ireland's Information and Statistics Officer Kevin Donnelly will be sharing ideas on how to reduce your digital carbon footprint. Kevin will cover topics such as assessing your internet usage to reviewing how we consume video content plus how to make the most of your digital storage and how to manage e-waste. There are plenty of tips to optimise our digital lives at work, at home and beyond! [Please sign up via](#) Microsoft Forms with your OU email address where possible and we will send a Microsoft Teams link nearer the time. There will also be time for Q&A.

For the final part of the session we will be joined by Helen Chambers from [Giki](#) who will explain more about the Digital Detox challenge we are running from 3–14 March. The challenge focuses on our digital carbon footprint and how we can reduce it. The steps range from very quick and easy to some longer-term ones, but there is something to suit everyone.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: 19 March

Sustainability and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are two of the five institutional goals in our Learn and Live Strategy. Whilst being distinct, these two goals are similar in that they can be delivered by all members of The OU family and really are a part of everyone's job. Many of the ecological crises we are experiencing today – climate change and nature depletion – are a direct result of an extractive and exploitative mindset; the fact is that the negative impacts – flooding, food insecurity, poor housing – are felt first and most keenly by those who have benefited the least. The intersectionality of Sustainability and EDI is complex and clear. Extending The OU's social justice mission to social and environmental justice and together, taking a focus on decarbonisation, decolonisation and democratisation is mutually reinforcing.

From the EDI team:

Colleagues are invited to share their ideas on race equality at the OU with the Race Equality Charter project team on Wednesday 19 March, from 12 – 1PM. Professor Josie Fraser (Vice-Chancellor) and Lorraine Jones (Director of EDI) will give a short overview of our commitment to the Race Equality Charter, followed by a workshop. Colleagues can expect open discussion, consultation and collaboration to develop actions to progress race equality within breakout rooms. If you'd like to register for this event, please do so via [My Learning Centre](#).

For more information contact edi-team@open.ac.uk

Month-long SDG Teach In – March

[The SDG Teach In](#) is a campaign to put the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and therefore sustainability, at the heart of all stages of education, and across all disciplines. This annual campaign calls upon educators to include the SDGs within their teaching, learning and assessment during the campaign (and beyond).

[Pledge](#) from now until the end of 31 March 2025 to get involved if you teach or research on SDGs.



Forthcoming EAUC events

[EAUC](#) is the leading body for sustainability in the post-16 education sector in the UK and Republic of Ireland. The OU has an institutional membership which means that all staff and students can attend EAUC events and benefit from the resources on offer, or share our own resources with others (please let the Sustainability Office know first). If you would like to be part of this collaborative community to learn and exchange with your counterparts in other universities, please do [sign up here](#). If you have students who would find this useful, please let them know by sharing [this page](#) with them.

- [Glasgow regional meet-up](#), 12 March, 2–4pm
- [Midlands regional meeting](#) (hybrid), 26 March, 10am– 12 noon
- [EAUC Energy and Water community of practice](#) 2 April, 11–12.30

OU-wide Sustainability Research Fest: 30 April–1 May

The [Open Societal Challenge](#) (OSC) programme, with generous help from various quarters, is organising the third OU-wide Sustainability Research Fest in the OU Library, and online, on 30 April–1 May 2025 from Wednesday afternoon to Thursday morning. Everyone with interests in sustainability research is warmly invited to take part.

The event will be focused on strengthening interdisciplinary research collaborations and clusters across and beyond the OU and will include presentations from highlighted OSC projects, external collaborators and research users, and a panel discussion on future research directions. There will be opportunities to present posters and soap-box/lightning talks. The format will be semi-hybrid with online networking sessions interwoven as far as practical for those unable to attend in person.

[Registration for the event will remain open until 31 March 2025](#) with an option to register for online or in-person attendance. Please note that in-person spaces are limited due to space restrictions and will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis. The agenda for the event will be circulated closer to date.

Help us share your positive news



Northern Ireland Science Festival

The week of the 10 February was NI Science Festival, and the OUil team took the opportunity to focus on a series of staff information sessions around the theme of sustainability. Dr. Victoria Hands, Director of Sustainability at the OU joined the OUil team for various activities and winder conversations on green tech skills, the impact of AI and data centres and how we can embed sustainability into our curriculum. [Catch up on the recordings](#) here.

The OU's Northern Ireland Science Festival event: *Humanities Giant Leap: Exploring Space and Sustainability* included talks by OU academics Mahesh Anand, Professor of Planetary Science and Exploration, Stephen Peake, Professor of Climate Change and Energy and Snr Lecturer Fiona Aiken. Over 600 people visited our information stands during the event with 115 people seated across the talks making it one of our most successful NISF events. Big thanks to Katrina Wallace, Ceremony & Events Manager and Kevin Donnelly, our Sustainability lead in Ireland, for all their efforts across the week.

One student said: *"I really enjoyed this event! I came away feeling more confident about my employability as a career changer coming from such a very different industry, I got some excellent feedback on how to make myself stand out to potential employers, and it's put to rest any intrusive doubts I still had about my own suitability for this career."*

Congratulations to the OU's Winter Wheelers

Well done to all those who took part in [Love to Ride](#) MK's Winter Wheelers challenge!

As a result of your cycling, The Open University was awarded 'Top Cycling Company (Trips per person)'. On behalf of all who took part at The OU, Jodi Houghton from Estates accepted the award from The Mayor of Milton Keynes, Marie Bradburn.

Continuing on this positive path, and to mark Love to Ride's Ride Anywhere Week, the Walton Hall campus is hosting a 30 minute bike ride around the beautiful Ouzel Valley area near to site on Wednesday 19th March at 12.30pm. To find out more information about the bike ride you can keep up-to-date on [Go Green's Viva Engage](#).

Fulfilling Futures in Environment and Sustainability

This month, Gabriella and Victoria were asked to provide a quote for a Careers event on Fulfilling Futures in Environment and Sustainability (more about that next month and the great work colleagues in the Careers and Employability

Service are doing to embed sustainability in their work). It's great to be asked to reflect like this and this is what we shared:

'Working in sustainability means being a good ancestor for future generations. It requires a wide range of skills including complexity awareness and the ability to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders through effective communication. Crafting compelling narratives that inspire action and drive positive change, fostering a greener future by embedding sustainability into everything we do, brings deep fulfilment and impact to each workday, alongside the challenges and frustrations.'

Sustainability is Everyone's job



OU's UN Global Compact Report – can you help?

The [United Nations' Global Compact](#) is the world's largest sustainability initiative – a call to companies and organisations to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and take actions that advance societal goals. There is also an active local and global network where we can learn and share good practice, in particular, disseminating our research in these areas.

The [OU's previous submission](#) was a collaborative piece of work and our next report is due to be submitted by November 2025 and will detail our work over the last two years.

If your work relates to these issues and you have examples of how you are embedding them in your practice whether that be teaching, research or operations, we would like to include you in our next report. If you can support the Sustainability Office with writing the report or coordinating colleagues to input, we would love to collaborate, please get in touch with the [Sustainability Office](#).

Can we help promote your sustainability course or module?

We are trying to make sure we have a comprehensive list of sustainability courses and modules on [our website](#). If we haven't listed your course or module on our website, please let us know and we would be happy to add it.

Get involved



Become an EAUC Member

To access resources and invites to regional meetings

HOW BAD ARE BANANAS? The Carbon Footprint Games

How Bad Are Bananas?

Play this game at your next team away day or event



Sign up to Giki

Register with Giki and take 10 minutes to calculate your personal carbon footprint.



Carbon Literacy Training

Upskill, resell and make a pledge to take workplace action.



LinkedIn

Join The Open University's Sustainability LinkedIn Group.



Go Green

Join our Go Green network and workshops.



Responsible Futures

A framework to embed sustainability in the curriculum.



Warp-It

Save money and reuse OU resources with Warp-It internally, or by signing up local charities and schools.



Sustainability Home

Keep revisiting the Sustainability pages for more information or [contact us via email](#).

With continued optimism,

Dr Victoria Hands, Gabriella Daroczi, Professor Nick Braithwaite

(The Sustainability Office)

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