



Welcome to this month's Sustainability Bulletin

October 2025



I've been inspired this month and also challenged by experimenting with new language to show the opportunities that sustainability brings. The world we want to live in may well look very different to the one we read about in the mainstream news and social media today. When we are immersed in these contemporary stories, it's often hard to decolonise, hard to think beyond the monoculture to reclaim and reimagine a radically different future. The climate and nature crisis have been referred to as a crisis of imagination. What if we nurture our individual and collective imagination to create stories of the world, we want to live in. For instance:

"It's 2050, we've defeated the billionaire era. Solar panels shine on every rooftop, powering community owned microgrids. Community gardens are thriving hubs. We govern with participative democracy, budgeting for people and planet. Wildlife is rebounding. Rivers run clean. We chose regeneration over greed." Rob Hopkins, founder of Transition Towns and author of 'What is to What if' and 'How to fall in love with the future: a time travellers guide to changing the world.'

How do you feel reading these few lines? As the conversations start about The OU's new strategy, we can all practice exercising active hope, telling stories of possibility, daring to dream big, reimagining and envisioning a sustainable world.

Now is the perfect time to influence The OU's future. [The Open University's new strategy](#) is being drafted. Share your thoughts on sustainability through one of our engagement opportunities listed on [the intranet page](#) or email Strategy-Feedback@open.ac.uk. Let's work together to shape a future where sustainability is central to everything we do, where sustainability really is everyone's job. If you want to top up on inspiration before this:

[How to Fall in Love with the Future w/ Rob Hopkins • Upstream](#)

We are launching a series of face to face and online discussions to gather your inspiration for sustainability at The OU. If you would like to join these sessions, please email: sustainability@open.ac.uk

Green Gown Award – Two OU projects short-listed!

Challenge Us! is a pioneering initiative from the Open Societal Challenges (OSC) programme that flips the traditional research model. Instead of academics setting research agendas, UK charities, communities, and SMEs submit pressing societal and sustainability challenges, which are then co-developed into interdisciplinary research projects. In its first year, Challenge Us! funded 25 co-created projects with 70+ external partners, addressing topics like early dementia detection, green roofing, inclusive innovation, and food insecurity. This democratised approach empowers community-driven problem solving and delivers research with tangible, measurable impact. With £3M institutional investment generating over £12M in external grants and 100+ open-access outputs, the model is now being adopted nationally. Recognised in the Scottish Parliament, Challenge Us! is redefining how post-16 research drives the Sustainable Development Goals—through inclusion, co-creation, and evidence-based solutions that truly matter to those most affected.

What did the team learn? That establishing a shared language is essential to develop sustainability projects that put communities first. That we need firmer, well evaluated, and standardised co-design frameworks to establish academically solid, community and environment-first research programmes. That while working in a large organisation dedicated legal and financial frameworks have to be put in place to support radically different work.

Take Five to Age Well is a groundbreaking UK-wide public health challenge led by The Open University and supported by Age UK and over 500 collaborators. This research-informed campaign empowers individuals to choose one action from the five areas offered (Eat, Drink, Move, Connect & Engage, and Think) and commit to it for one month. With a format inspired by Dry January, it encourages lasting behavioural change through daily guidance, motivational support, and community engagement. Launched during the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, the initiative is grounded in the OU's Open Societal Challenges programme and extensive research by Dr. Jitka Vseteckova.

What did the team learn? That there is a substantial appetite amongst the public for ...initiative[s] ... that engage people with health and wellbeing, celebrate small changes and inclusivity and share health information. That we need to go further in engaging people from diverse backgrounds including socio-economic and ethnicity. We've found that best engagement for these

populations is via community champions and grassroots organisations. That it is possible to reach large numbers of people, UK-wide, supporting them to make sustainable behavioural changes. Our non-judgemental approach to encouraging healthy ageing was welcomed by participants, who wanted more contact and advice. However, it was most important to meet people where they are at both mentally, physically and socio-economically. For example, we needed to meet those who are not digitally confident with offline groups and resources. Group facilitators used the five action areas to talk to groups and do actions together as a community.

Watch this page to find out who the winners are, [announced on 6 November at a ceremony in Birmingham](#).

With continued optimism,

Victoria, Klaus-Dieter, Gabriella and Avril

Dates for your green diary



New OU Sustainable Energy Research Cluster announced – 6 November

A new OU research cluster [Sustainable Energy: Research & Applications \(SERA\)](#), hosted by the Faculty of Business and Law (FBL) is launching on Thursday, 6th of November 2025 (10.00 am – 12.00 noon) in the Michael Young Building Meeting Rooms (MYB1).

Anyone interested in how a Higher Education institution like the OU can strategically engage with diverse issues regarding the transition to renewable energy is welcome to join.

To register visit:

[Sustainable Energy: Research Applications \(SERA\) Research Cluster Launch Event Registration](#)

EAUC events – November & December

[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. Upcoming events:

[Ireland Branch Meeting \(Virtual\) 4 November 2025 11:00 – 12:00](#)

[Offsetting Community of Practice Meeting \(Virtual\) 26 November 2025 11:00 – 12:00](#)

[EAUC Biodiversity Community of Practice Meeting \(Virtual\) 1 December 2025 11:00 – 12:30](#)

Calling PGRs: World Summit of PhD Students and Postdoctoral Researchers on Sustainable Development 2025 – 19 November

The World Summit of PhD Students and Postdoctoral Researchers on Sustainable Development will take place online on November 19, 2025. Under the theme "Sustainability Research in Action: Local Solutions, Global Impact" this event will offer a diverse full-day programme, with presentations from PhD Students and Postdoc researchers, as well as lectures from educators and experts working on the field of sustainable development.

Participation in the event is free of any charge and is open to doctoral and postdoctoral students working on matters related to sustainable development at both an early stage and at an advanced stage of their work. To take part in the World Summit with a presentation about your research, interested colleagues should [send an expression of interest via this form](#).

COP-30 From the Global South – 24 November

The 2025 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference (COP-30 for short) will take place in Belém, Pará, Brazil from 10 to 21 November 2025.

Brazil is positioning COP-30 as a turning point for global climate action. Will it deliver? This global gathering at the heart of the Amazonian rainforest has unsurprisingly put climate finance for protecting forests high on the agenda. Will the rich nations put their money where their mouth is and will the pledges turn to practice? Another key issue is Indigenous peoples, which Brazil is keen to amplify. Will their voices be heard by the global leaders?

If you are wondering about all these questions, join us for the panel discussion on [Monday 24th November \(14:00–15:00 GMT\)](#) and listen to the perspectives on COP-30 from the Global South. The panel will reflect on the happenings at the conference over the previous two weeks and analyse what the decisions taken at COP-30 mean for countries in the Global South. [Register now](#).

Decarbonise and Decolonise CPD with UCU – 1 December

This workshop will introduce the topics and identify opportunities to take action, across all staff roles. The full aims of the interactive workshop are to:

- provide an introductory understanding of climate justice
- explore decolonising and decarbonising themes, and how they intersect with issues like race, gender, class and indigeneity
- support participants to identify opportunities to apply decolonising and decarbonising for climate justice to the education sector

- encourage participants to develop their own practice to consider climate justice and intersectionality

As a CPD workshop, attendance is free to all OU and OCA employees. The event is hosted by UCU as part of their year of climate action. It is open to members of a different trade union, no union, or those curious about trade unions' role in achieving sustainability.

Monday, 1st December 2-3:30pm, online, see [registration page](#) for Zoom link and more details.

News, resources & engagement opportunities

Sustainability News from Northern Ireland



Tara Craig and Dr Imelda Haran were delighted to attend the Export & Freight Transport & Logistics Awards 2025 in the Crowne Plaza, Belfast on behalf of Dr. Victoria Hands, who was an invited guest and one of the judges for the Road to Net Zero Champion category, won by Manfreight.

The judges applauded an impressive set of entries from pioneering organisations, stating that the collective knowledge, skills and impact represented by the finalists shows the power of collaboration to support business growth and provide high quality sustainable services. The judges commended the pioneering approaches, the committed partnerships and the progress to achieve net zero.

BBC Academy Live Climate Creatives 2025

One of our Responsible Futures leads, Teresa Cox from PVC-Students, was invited to the Climate Creatives 2025 event held at the Royal Geographical Society in London earlier this month. Talks from inspirational speakers emphasised the role of the arts and the power of storytelling to respond to the nature and climate crises.



Opening remarks and welcome were delivered by Professor Joe Smith, Director of the Royal Geographical Society and former OU Geography Lecturer, who authored on U116 (a level 1 environmental module) some 17 years ago! Teresa presented him with a copy!

Teresa's highlights included a South Ken Zen walking tour, a Parakeet tour and an energising chat with Radio One presenter Swarzy Shire. The local Council and scientists from the Natural History Museum are working together to adapt to climate change by collaborating on education, increasing green spaces,

planting trees for shade and installing planters to attract insects. An inspiring quote from the day may inspire us all:

"There's something called stubborn optimism that can really keep us going – optimism that change can happen when we work together, and a stubbornness to keep going even when things look dark." Dame Maggie Aderin-Pocock, Space Scientist and Presenter from The Sky at Night

Sustainability News from Scotland

The Open University in Scotland is a member of the Converge Challenge, a prestigious competition that supports innovative business propositions to become sustainable companies that will have a positive impact in Scotland. Converge programmes have become a critical part of the eco-system to support entrepreneurs in Scotland, working closely with the university sector.

Annually, Converge has a celebratory Awards Evening, where shortlisted entrants to their various competitions can win equity-free funding and in-kind support. This year the Awards event was held in Prestonfield House in Edinburgh in early October. Although we didn't have any winners from The Open University this time, we had more student entries than ever before, and for the first time, we had two judges on panels, aligned closely to sustainability themes. Professor Stephen Peake was a judge for the Net Zero award, and Professor Pallavi Anand was a judge for the Blue Economy award.

Hamza's Hidden Wild Isles – New OU/BBC Co-production



The OU/BBC Co-production, [Hamza's Hidden Wild Isles](#), started at 6.15pm on Sunday 12th October on BBC1 and BBC iPlayer aiming to uncover just a few of those wildlife wonders lying right under our noses. The four-part series features wildlife cameraman Hamza Yassin who zooms in on both the wildlife and the people who care about creatures great and small.

The Open University (OU)'s Dr Yoseph Araya and Dr Philip Wheeler contributed to the production of the series as Academic Consultants, providing expert insight and research. **Hamza's Hidden Wild Isles** is a Silverback Films series for BBC One and iPlayer, co-produced by The Open University and The National Trust.

AUDE

The Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE) promotes excellence in the strategic planning, management, operation and development of Higher Education estates and facilities. Membership of AUDE is free for all your colleagues, so do pass on this email and [follow this link to register](#).

Recent publications

- [How to digitise and visualise your estate: Bringing estates intelligence to life.](#)
- [Climate change adaptation and resilience guide.](#)

Free member benefits:

- [Coaching programme](#)
- [Work shadowing programme](#)
- [Development fund](#)

Help us share your positive news



Avril Moore has recently moved to Governance, Compliance and Legal Services in the University Secretary's Office where half of her time is spent supporting the Sustainability Office. She shares her positive news about the Ecosia Launch and how she quite literally has made sustainability her job since her Carbon Literacy Training a couple of years ago!

Ecosia Launch

You may have spotted the exciting news [in Open Priorities on 7 October](#): the OU is adopting **Ecosia** as the default search engine on all OU-managed devices! This simple switch means that every time we search the web, we can help Ecosia plant trees and support global reforestation projects—turning everyday actions into a force for sustainability. [You can find out more in this video](#).

What makes this change even more inspiring is how it started: with a single carbon literacy pledge! During Carbon Literacy Training which is fully funded for all OU staff and students, I committed to raising awareness of ways colleagues could reduce their carbon footprint while working from home. That pledge sparked an idea—what if we could make an eco-friendly search engine the norm at The OU?

It turned out I wasn't alone. The Sustainability Office encouraged me. Many staff and students were already using Ecosia and similar tools. Conversations and presentations revealed strong support across teams, and with encouragement from colleagues like Lindsay Wilson, our Academic Services Sustainability Lead and AS Exec, the idea began to grow roots. Together with Digital Services, we

launched a three-month pilot among Professional Services staff. The results—both data and feedback—spoke volumes.

With evidence in hand, we took the proposal to VCE-Academic, where it was approved. And now, here we are—proof that grassroots ideas can blossom into organisation-wide change.

What did I learn along the way?

It helps to find allies wherever you can, and ideally someone at a senior level to help you. Make sure you speak with passion, know your stuff and don't give up! I found senior leaders to be very receptive to my requests for a chat and keen to point me in the right direction to progress.

Be patient and remember there are useful lessons to learn from every step. Even if your idea doesn't progress, you will have gained experience that you can use in the future.

Taking time to learn more about environmental issues isn't always easy and can be hard emotionally but it can also really help to empower us to take steps to help embed the change we need. Please consider becoming Carbon Literate yourself, [sign up for the course here](#).

Got an Idea for Change?

Your voice matters! If you've got a sustainability idea—big or small—share it with the Sustainability team via sustainability@open.ac.uk. Together, we can make a difference!

Sustainability is Everyone's job



SPARK your interest?

Liz Davies, Senior Faculty Comms Manager in Marketing, Communications and Development presented the work she has done to help her unit as a SPARK lead address its sustainability agenda at a recent Sustainability Co-ordination Group meeting. In her presentation, Liz talked through how she has brought together different representatives from across the unit and agreed key sustainability objectives with the Unit's Senior Leadership Team. [You can find more about SPARK and Liz's presentation here](#).

COP 30 – showcasing your academic work

COP 30 will be held shortly in Brazil and we are keen to look for opportunities to showcase OU academics who undertake sustainability research or work in

South America. Please get in touch with the [Sustainability Office](#) if this is you and you'd like to showcase your work further.

Sustainability Away Day at LSE



In mid-October, Klaus-Dieter Rossade (Executive Sponsor for Sustainability), Victoria Hands (Director of Sustainability), and Gabriella Daroczi (Sustainability Project Manager) from The OU visited the London School of Economics & Political Science to learn from its sustainability activities. We heard about the launch of the [Global School of Sustainability](#) earlier this year and the work of the [Grantham Institute](#). We learned how Academic Services have an Education for Sustainable Development advisor and we were inspired by the development of [LSE100](#) which started as an undergraduate, inter-disciplinary course 15 years ago and was so useful to students that it has now become credit bearing and mandatory.

A tour from the Director of Estates showed how LSE tackles Scope 1 and 2 emissions through infrastructure and operational strategies and we saw how staff and students enjoy using the award-winning spaces. We shared information on the ongoing challenge of reducing Scope 3 emissions. The key insight was clear: for The OU, the greatest opportunity to drive long-term impact lies in embedding sustainability into our curriculum. By equipping students with green skills we can foster sustainability leaders and with the majority of OU students being in work, we can influence decision-making now as well as in the future. Education becomes the most powerful tool for shaping a sustainable future.

Get involved



Become an EAUC Member

To access resources and invites to regional meetings

HOW BAD ARE BANANAS?

The Carbon Footprint Games

Carbon Literacy Project



LinkedIn

Join The Open University's Sustainability LinkedIn Group.



Go Green

Join our Go Green network and workshops.

Carbon Literacy Training

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



Responsible Futures

A framework to embed sustainability in the curriculum

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