

# A MESSAGE FROM NICK BRAITHWAITE

I'm pleased to include in this newsletter the dates for our second Sustainability Research Festival 2024. Sharing our work with colleagues, identifying opportunities for collaboration, and fostering debate and discussion is a key part of making sure our interdisciplinary sustainability research thrives.



Throughout the OU, you can see the effect of teams working across disciplines to deliver our sustainability goals. It is particularly encouraging to see how colleagues are responding to the request for evidence on the 50 criteria which will enable us to gain Responsible Futures accreditation. We are still on the lookout for evidence of how you are embedding sustainability in the formal, informal, or subliminal curriculum – suggestions before the student-led audit in mid-April will be appreciated.

Alongside our research and our teaching, it's vital that our daily working practices demonstrate our sustainability values. I congratulate colleagues who worked to gain accreditation of three of our labs by *My Green Lab*.

Details on these and other Sustainability activity follows below.

## **Sustainability Research Festival 2024: June 12-13 in the OU Library, Milton Keynes (with online options)**

The [Open Societal Challenge](#) (OSC) programme and colleagues across our four faculties are joining forces to organise a second OU-wide **Sustainability Research Festival**. Everyone with interests in sustainability research of any kind is warmly invited to join in. The event will include showcasing and workshop sessions focused on creating new interdisciplinary research collaborations and research clusters across the OU. The event will include presentations from highlighted OSC projects, external collaborators, and research users. Online participation will facilitate engagement from colleagues across the 4 Nations, with remote-access networking sessions interwoven through the programme.

The event will feature an update on the OU's plan to join the [UN Academic Impact](#) (UNAI) programme – an overarching sustainability coordination, collaboration and networking framework involving some 2000 or so universities across the globe (contact Faculty leads Neil Edwards, Richard Blundel, Rosina Marquez-Reiter, or Giles Mohan for more details).

The official announcement and more details will follow, but meanwhile if you have any ideas for activities for sessions or, better still, offers to help coordinate, please contact [Neil Edwards](#) (OSC sustainability lead) or one of the UNAI Faculty Leads listed above.

Running over two days, to enable as many colleagues as possible to join for all or some of the time, the event will coincide with the [ESD Changemakers](#) final project celebration in the morning of 12 June, featuring student and staff collaboration to embed sustainability in the curriculum.

### **Responsible Futures**

This whole institution accreditation programme is a partnership approach working closely with the OU Students Association. Fifty criteria are used to evaluate the embedding of sustainability across all aspects of student learning, from how we communicate with our learners before they start studying to everything they learn and experience during their time with us. Responsible Futures was created by the charity SOS-UK (Students Organising for Sustainability) and is a unique student-led audit approach. Securing this accreditation is one of our three [success measures or institutional KPIs for sustainability](#).

The most recent Go Green lunchtime workshop featured a panel to discuss Responsible Futures. David Morse (AD Curriculum, STEM), Teresa Cox (Senior Manager, PVCS), Jess Smith (Associate Director of Projects and Services, OUSA), Viktoria Urban (Student Intern) and Marta Nowicka (SOS-UK) discussed the challenges of pan-OU accreditation and how all colleagues can get involved. If you missed the session, you can [watch the recording on the intranet](#).

### **OUSA's Environmental and Sustainability Working Group progress**

This group is made up of OU Student Leadership Team members, student volunteers and Association staff who meet monthly to discuss all things sustainability.

Since sharing their [Action Plan on the Environment and Sustainability in January 2023](#), significant progress has been made, including the creation of an [Environment and Sustainability web hub](#), hosting a successful sustainability panel event as part of [Freshers Fortnight Sept-Oct 2023](#) and ongoing collaborative work on Responsible Futures accreditation. In addition, The Students Association's Board of Trustees has approved their [Environmental Sustainability Policy](#) that cements OUSA's commitment to the sustainability work they are doing.

### **My Green Lab Certification**

Excellent work by our Labs technical team mean that three laboratory areas have recently received *My Green Lab* Certification: The Ecosystems labs received an excellent Gold rating; the Microbiology/Astrobiology Lab and the Electron Microscopy Suite both secured the best possible outcome of a Green rating (above gold). This achievement gets us off to a good start for all our labs.

Labs can be difficult to operate sustainably. Typically, they use five to ten times more energy than office spaces, five times more water (per square metre); worldwide around 5.5 million tonnes of plastic waste is traceable to laboratory activities.

Recognized by the United Nations Race to Zero campaign as a key measure of progress towards a zero-carbon future, [My Green Lab Certification](#) is considered the gold standard for laboratory sustainability practice around the world. The accreditation involves a thorough online assessment of our lab practices, equipment, waste, and procurement, without disrupting the critical work underway. Congratulations to our Labs teams! You can read further detail [here](#).

## **Upcoming events and training**

### **Sustainability Leadership Skills Programme**

After a successful in-person training in January, the Sustainability Leadership Skills Programme is now offered online, in two 3-hour sessions, on 11th March (Part one) and 18th March (Part two).

The programme encourages collaboration, by attending the workshops, participants gain the skills and knowledge required to contribute towards the OU's Sustainability goals.

For more information and to book the last remaining places visit [My Learning Centre](#).

### **Systems Thinking for a Sustainable Future**

We are pleased to open the invitation to attend a System Thinking Community of Practice session on Friday, 15th March 1-2:30pm, focusing on Systems Thinking for a Sustainable Future, presented by Eleanor Wills from ChangeAgents UK.

In this interactive session, we'll collaboratively explore sustainability from a systems perspective including its root causes and opportunities. We'll also put the skill to practice in breakout rooms by exploring solutions that break down silos and can create wider change for a sustainable future. To attend the session please sign up via My Learning Centre: [Course: Systems Thinking CoP \(learningpool.com\)](#).

### **Supporting climate action through digital education: new free OpenLearn BOC**

The Institute of Educational Technology (IET) have recently launched a free OpenLearn Badged Open Course (BOC) supporting educators across multiple sectors and subjects in addressing the climate emergency in their teaching. The 16-hour course, '[Supporting climate action through digital education](#)' covers topics including eco-anxiety, climate justice, individual and collaborative climate action, addressing the climate crisis through disciplines such as literature, photography, citizen science and health studies, and ways in which intergenerational dialogue can support radical empathy. To date, 120 students have enrolled on the course since its launch on 23 January.

## Planet Earth III at Northern Ireland Science Festival

As part of the NI Science Festival 2024, the OU hosted a [talk](#) on Planet Earth III and the influence of these natural history programmes on public conservation. Asking what impact can we really have to stop the continual degradation of habitats and ecosystems? The talk featured Dr Julia Cooke, Associate Dean of external engagement and senior lecturer in ecology, Producer Matt Brandon and Dr Miranda Dyson, Senior Lecturer in Biology and academic consultant on Planet Earth III.

Before the presentation they spoke to the [Belfast Telegraph about conservation and biodiversity in Northern Ireland.](#)

### Warp-It

Do you know a charity that could benefit from items no longer needed by Warp-It members? Thousands of items such as office furniture, fixtures and fittings, soft furnishings, catering and kitchen equipment, office stationery and consumables, uniforms, lab equipment, and medical equipment, are distributed to charities. [Get them signed up - for free.](#)

Also, if you know of any schools or charities that need stationery then please get in touch with the Sustainability Office [sustainability@open.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@open.ac.uk).

### Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and Sustainability

Following interviews with OU staff over the Summer of 2022, we established that one important influence over curriculum content are the PSRBs who set standards and accredit courses. With over 200 PSRBs in the UK, we worked with SOS-UK to review how sustainability is taken into account within the 24 PSRBs we work most closely with at the OU and how they can contribute to delivering on Net Zero



commitments in the UK. You can read the [report here](#). We found that whilst some were proactively including sustainability, many were not. In collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, the University of Southampton, SOS-UK and the EAUC we have just hosted a St George's House consultation event at Windsor Castle bringing together PSRBs, educators, industry, graduate, and student voices to listen and learn from each other. The beautiful venue and spirit of 'nurturing wisdom through dialogue' meant that guests had the chance for in-depth reflective discussion. A consultation report will be published shortly. If you would like to find out more or contribute to this on-going work, please contact us via [sustainability@open.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@open.ac.uk).

With continued optimism,

**Nick**

## VCE Sponsor for Sustainability and Executive Dean, STEM Faculty

**Carbon  
Literacy  
Training**

**SPARK Lunch  
& Learn  
recordings**

**Warp-It  
information  
and sign-up**

**LinkedIn OU  
Sustainability  
Network**

DISCLAIMER: Internal Communications are aware of a known issue with Mailerlite where links are sometimes corrupting after we have sent the message out. Please be assured that if this does occur, we will work with MailerLite to rectify the issue as soon as possible.

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University needs to collect and process personal data in order to carry out our duties as an employer. This document sets out how we use your personal data. [Colleague Privacy Notice](#).

### **The Open University**

Walton Hall, Milton Keynes  
MK7 6AA, UK  
01908 274066  
[www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk)