

A MESSAGE FROM NICK BRAITHWAITE

Dear colleagues,

It was bright and sunny in many parts of the 4 UK Nations on the day that the last sustainability bulletin went out, featuring the 1844 poem “No Sun, no Moon, no morn, no noon... November”.



The verse was written in 1844 by London-based Thomas Hood. In reflecting on that irony, I realised that Hood was writing at a time when coal-burning was powering the industrial revolution and was also the primary form of heating for even draughtier housing stock than we have today. Particulate air pollution was a growing problem and was contributing to the formation of thick fog, termed ‘smog’, in cities such as London during anticyclonic winter weather.

A century or so later in 1952, it got so bad that a 5-day dense London ‘smog’ is reckoned to have caused 12000 ‘excess deaths’ that winter. This triggered the first of three ‘clean air’ acts of parliament (1956, 1968 and 1993) bringing in strict controls on smoke emissions from coal.

The measures introduced made a significant impact, through enforced compliance with this early example of environmental legislation. The type of London smog that Hood was describing is now a thing of the past - aha, it can be done! However, as the burning of solid fossil fuels has steadily reduced, air pollution from the automotive use of petrol and diesel has grown again to health-threatening proportions in our cities ... and with it, eventually, comes further clean air legislation. As COP28 comes to an indecisive conclusion, I look forward to our learning someday soon to just leave fossil fuels in the ground.

Reference: Brimblecombe P. (2006) *The Clean Air Act after 50 years*, Available at: <https://gahp.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Clean-Air-Act-after-50-years.pdf> (Accessed: 10 Dec 2023)

Highly Commended

You may recall from my [September bulletin](#), that a team in LDS were nominated as finalists in this year’s [Green Gown Awards](#) in the staff sustainability champion category.

The team were entered for their work on developing sustainability resources that support university colleagues in their module design – summarised in [this short 3-minute video](#). I’m delighted to let you know that they were awarded ‘highly commended’ at the award ceremony on 29 November in

Liverpool. Well done team and thank you to the students who gave their invaluable input!

Flanked by Green Gown Awards co-host Emeritus Professor Peter Liss, CBE, FRS, University of East Anglia and Interim Executive Chair of NERC (left) and award sponsor, Ian Rodger, Director of Programmes, Salix Finance (right) are the LDS team (second left to second right) Tom Olney, Tehnaz Crook, Paul Astles, Catriona Matthews, and Kathleen Calder accepting the award on behalf of the Learning Design sustainability group. Not pictured members of the team, Hayley Johns and James Openshaw.



Warp-It Savings

In November we officially launched [Warp-It](#) (after a short pilot), a system designed to support the reuse and redistribution of surplus assets within the University. This reduces our carbon emissions and waste. It's great to see that the OU in Scotland and the OU in Ireland are also operating Warp-It schemes and made large contributions to these savings. For access and details on using Warp-It, visit the [internal Warp-It page](#).

It's been a Banana's year!

Throughout 2023 we have been providing colleagues and students with our [Carbon Literacy courses](#). The 8-hour sessions are accredited by the Carbon Literacy Project. In addition, we have trained 37 colleagues on the 'How Bad Are Bananas?' game, which can be delivered in shorter taster sessions and as team building activities. Questioning and comparing the carbon footprints of everyday things helps any of us identify, challenge and ultimately reduce unsustainable behaviours at work and at home.



Our 37 certified facilitators in England, Ireland and Scotland (Wales to follow) have played dozens of games with hundreds of colleagues. Our biggest game to date is with MarComms (120+ online, mentioned in my [October bulletin](#)). Dixie, the assistance dog, (pictured right with her owner) attended training for the Academic Services Group in FBS, where Jodi Houghton, Carbon Coordinator (Estates), ran the game at a team face-to-face event. Jodi said, "The game is great fun and such a good way to 'meet people where they are at' and engage them on sustainability. It prompts great quality discussion and people seem to enjoy participating and learning".

If you are interested in becoming a facilitator or would like to arrange a facilitator for the 'How Bad Are Bananas?' game for your team or event, you can contact sustainability@open.ac.uk.

A successful mock COP

Secondary schools from across Highland and Moray in Scotland came together for their own mock conference ahead of COP 28 taking place in Dubai. The 'mock COP' is designed to give a voice to and share the ambition of young people working for a more sustainable world.

Organised by the OU in Scotland and partners, the event in Inverness brought together fifth and sixth-year pupils to negotiate on behalf of chosen countries and organisations while trying to make a difference to reduce carbon emissions. Pupils also had the opportunity to hear from academics and representatives who attend the actual COP. You can read more about this fantastic engagement event and watch Dr Leslie Mabon sum up the work of the pupils on the [OUiS website](#).

Business updates...

Global Compact

Every two years the OU submits a 'Communication of Engagement' (CoE) to the UN Global Compact. The report publicly demonstrates our commitment to sustainable development and summarises our activities in relation to the UN SDGs (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals). We submitted our second and most recent report in November 2023 detailing some of the projects, research and initiatives going on across the OU. Both reports are available to [view on the Global Compact website](#). If you have anything you can contribute- to future external reports, then please [get in touch](#) and work to ensure your activities are embedded in your [SPARK](#).

People and Planet

The People & Planet League is an annual ranking of UK Universities based on environmental and ethical performance is due to be released this week. Please keep an eye on OU Life for further updates about our performance.

Bridging the ESG skills gap

In [my last bulletin](#), I shared The OU's [Environmental, Social, and Governance \(ESG\) report](#) was released at The Scotsman's Green Skills Conference in

Glasgow and asked you to share the link more widely.

Director of Sustainability, Dr Victoria Hands, was also interviewed for an [article on 'Bridging the ESG skills gap'](#) which was published by BDU (Business Development Unit) last week and will run as the lead feature in the B2B newsletter tomorrow (14 December). There is also an ESG webinar that we have made

Sustainable festivities

I hope you can take this festive time to rest and reconnect with loved ones, it is also a great opportunity to think of ways we can celebrate more sustainably. I found [WWF's ultimate guide to having a sustainable festive season to be a useful resource](#).

If you are feeling up to the challenge, you can also try [Veganuary](#) as you welcome in 2024. In the EU alone, over 60% of cropland is used to produce animal feed rather than food for human consumption. The OU catering team have been working with BaxterStorey to promote vegan options in January so keep an eye out for these when you are in the Hub.

As always, remember to keep an eye on the ['Get Involved'](#) sustainability web pages where you can find a wide range of resources and all our archive communications.

With continued optimism, particularly for the new year, just six years now until the first of our 2030 Net Zero commitments!

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**

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