Sustainability is a shared challenge with goals that demand teamwork, as well as ideas and initiatives that inspire us as individuals. Sharing the challenge, I am really pleased to take my turn to introduce this month’s Sustainability bulletin.

At The Open University, our commitment to promote educational opportunity and social justice through high-quality university education aligns convincingly with many aspects of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

As citizens, teachers and researchers we may be looking for ways to learn more about sustainability, making changes in our lives around climate change and aligning our disciplines and methodologies towards the education, equalities, trade, health and cultural practices that make positive impacts on the Sustainable Development Goals and in the lives of individuals, communities and societies.

This monthly Sustainability bulletin celebrates the creativity and impact of our people, whether that be our students, our teachers or our researchers, and we thank colleagues for their ideas that make small and big changes for sustainability in our education, our research and our business practices.

As colleagues within a complex, four-nation, distance-learning and multi-disciplinary university, I wonder if there may be a further challenge to organise our work towards a coherent ethical, social and governance strategy? We know from a range of consultancy interventions and from a range of HE institutions’ work around the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals that education stakeholders – students, staff and partners – want to be associated with purposeful organisations doing the right thing across the full reach of their activities.

Perhaps we can challenge ourselves more, and achieve more, by mobilising an environmental, social, and governance (ESG) strategy that joins the dots across our many environmental, social, governance, economic and ethical goals and aligns better multifaceted, complex and perhaps even competing performance measures?

Adrienne Scullion, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Join the sOUstainability (see what we did there?) conversation
In October 2024, it is five years since the OU held its Climate Emergency Forum attracting hundreds of staff to give their views and advice on how to embed sustainability in the daily work and the global influence of The OU. As the Sustainability Office compiles evidence of engagement, action and impact over this time we also look to the future. If you want to contribute your views to Adrienne’s questions above, or join us to co-create a meaningful approach to sustainability going forward, please email sustainability@open.ac.uk. Watch out for details of our sOUstainability conversation event shortly.

The Inner Development Goals (IDGs)

Those who signed up for the Sustainability Leadership training in January 2024 were asked to do an exercise to identify their ‘super power’ based on the qualities described below. Which describes you naturally, which are you known for within your friends and family networks? How can you bring this ‘super power’ to work with you?

The Inner Development Goals (IDGs) may be the missing link in delivering action on the Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainability Office has a keen interest in ways of working for sustainability and our Director of Sustainability recently attended the IDG Forum. If you feel these goals would align with your work, please be in touch via sustainability@open.ac.uk and watch out for further engagement events on the IDGs in the Autumn.

Thank you

Huge thanks to Kate Signorini (OU in Scotland) and John Addy (OU in Ireland) for their work embedding sustainability at the OU. Both Kate and John have been key members of the Sustainability Co-ordination Group, sharing best practice and championing sustainability in their respective nations. We wish them both luck in their future endeavours and thank them for their service.

Thanks to Teresa Cox, Senior Manager (Access Programme) Centre for Access, Open and Cross-curricular Innovation, PVC Students who has put in
a lot of time and effort to ensure we were prepared for the Responsible Futures audit, reflected in our passing the audit first time. We are so grateful for Teresa’s enthusiasm and inclusive, collaborative approach and wish her well as she starts a phased return to work after an injury.

We would also like to thank Ismay Mummery, Research Student, STEM; Jodi Houghton, Carbon Coordinator, Estates and Lizzie McCauley, Digital Services Development Officer, Library Services for volunteering to become facilitators of the OU’s Carbon Literacy Training. Register your interest in Carbon Literacy Training for future sessions.

Eco-friendly search engines

Academic services colleagues are raising awareness of eco-friendly search engines, such as Ecosia. Ecosia is a search engine that contributes to environmental sustainability by using 100% of its profits to plant trees. In terms of functionality, it is possible to choose to use Google or Bing to return your searches in Ecosia's settings, so the results you get should be at least as good as through Google (or whatever search engine you use currently). You can find out more about in this article from Academic Services, Avril Moore, here.

How do you feel about environmental issues? Take part in the OU’s citizen science research!

We are looking for colleagues from across the OU to contribute to the OU’s ‘Springtime Renewal’ citizen science research on eco-anxiety and eco-action. It’s quick and easy to do - please spare a few minutes to share your thoughts. Insights from this study will help OU research colleagues better understand the role of emotions in environmental perception and experience, and how practical activities can help people address their eco-anxiety at the same time as making a meaningful difference. Find out more and take part via the nQuire citizen science platform.

Our Net Zero Week event is online

The OU sponsored the UK’s second #NetZeroWeek this July. As part of the partnership we hosted a panel event ‘Driving change: Imagining a different transport future’. The panel of OU researchers, alumni and industry practitioners discussed how emerging technologies may provide the foundation for more sustainable and inclusive transport futures.

If you missed our Net Zero Week event, it is available to watch again on YouTube.
Education for Sustainable Development Changemakers

Thank you to all the students and staff who participated in the Education for Sustainable Development Changemakers programme. The initiative partners students and academics to co-create innovative approaches to integrating ESD into our teaching and learning practices. If you or your students want to be part of this impactful work which generates innovative ideas and co-creates solutions, please volunteer for the programme next year by emailing sustainability@open.ac.uk.

EAUC (Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges) Conference 2024

Colleagues from across the UK FE and HE sector came together at the University of Winchester for the EAUC conference and 20th birthday celebrations. Catriona Matthews and Paul Astles, Learning Designers from LDS have written about their experience of the conference on the Learning Design Blog. The OU membership of the EAUC means all staff and students can sign up and access the excellent resources, meet counterparts in other universities and share and learn together.

Latest article for Climate Perspectives

Our latest article for Climate Perspectives is from Willow Neal. Willow is a postgraduate researcher in the School of Earth, Environmental and Ecosystem Sciences. In their article ‘Butterflies as indicators of our impacts on nature’, Willow describes the importance of butterflies and their research to explore the benefits of urban pollinator patches.

You can join the national Big Butterfly Count until 4th August from the comfort of your own garden, balcony, park or street.

The OU’s first travel fayre

Organised by the Estates Travel Advice team, the OU held its first Milton Keynes Travel Fayre. Participants included the Rewards team, Tusker, Go Smart, Arriva, Cyclescheme and Cycle Saviours. Attendees accessed sustainable travel advice, had their bikes repaired, or were able to test drive an EV car. Visit the Travel Advice News page for future events and updates.

Congratulations to Lou Robinson
OUSA’s Lou Robinson has been shortlisted for a 2024 Green Gown Award in the student category. Lou has been a constant champion for sustainability within OUSA, and as part of the Responsible Futures OU and OUSA Steering Group. This shortlisting acknowledges her fantastic sustainability work and whilst the award ceremony is in November, we believe she has already won the hearts and minds of countless staff and students. Well done Lou!

**Get involved**

Think about your own work-place sustainability initiatives and ensure you feed these into your Sustainability Planning, Action and Reporting Kit (SPARK) through your Unit, or School Sustainability Lead (Sparkee). This enables the Sustainability Office to include your activity in the quarterly Institutional Performance Report (page 10), Annual Accounts and other external reporting such as Global Compact.

The range of ways to get involved are summarised below. A good first step is to sign up to receive EAUC newsletters and join the shared jisc-mail, where you can meet colleagues in your area in other universities and learn to make changes together. We look forward to your engagement and feedback to make positive impacts towards both the Sustainable Development Goals and the Inner Development Goals.

*Victoria Hands, Gabriella Daroczi, Nick Braithwaite (The Sustainability Office)*
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