



The Open University Sustainable Food Strategy

Version number: 4.2	Approved by: Sustainability Steering Group (Executive)
Effective from: July 2023	Date for review: October 2023

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Sustainable Food Strategy – Open University Walton Hall

1. Introduction

The Open University strives to provide students, staff and visitors with a healthy, high quality, value for money sustainable food service. With a significant proportion of greenhouse gases being attributed to the food system/chain, along with the University's target to reach net zero greenhouse emissions no later than 2050, sustainability is at the heart of catering's ethos.

The University is proud to work with Baxterstorey whose company values strongly align with the OU's sustainability targets.

2. Aims and Objectives

The team have adopted a multi-faceted approach in ensuring the planets resources are best used, and have identified key areas to focus on:

- Minimise all types of waste – prevent, reduce, reuse, recycle
- Ethical trading and supply chain
- Menus featuring seasonal and sustainable dishes
- Health & wellbeing

3. Scope

The policy covers all retail outlets (excluding the shop) and hospitality services across Walton Hall campus.

4. Our journey - achievements and challenges to date

Minimise waste – prevent, reduce, reuse, and recycle

Food waste

Effective management of waste starts with effective production planning, with sales and wastage data being monitored to reflect future & past production levels. A food waste target

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of 3% has been set, with performance being measured and monitored as part of the monthly KPI process. During 2022/23 Q1 achieved average of 3.91%

Discount is given to fast-track sales of short life perishable items, with unsold food at the end of the day being offered free to staff and students to prevent items being treated as waste.

Unavoidable waste & other pantry kitchen waste is sent to a local anaerobic digestion facility for processing into bioenergy for the generation of renewable electricity which is returned to the national grid. During 2021/22 we generated sufficient power to power a terraced house for a year.

Waste oil

Waste oil has been recycled for many years and since December 2019 nearly 1,500 litres of waste oil has been reprocessed into bio diesel.

Charity donations

We have worked with a number of local charities and schools since 2018, whether this be to relocate surplus stock and end of day foods or to donate redundant equipment for reuse.

Furniture

In 2019 much of the seating in the Bay area was showing signs of wear, the chairs were 9 years old, perfectly usable but just shabby we arranged to have them recovered in new material rather than being replaced.

Eliminate the reliance on single use disposables wherever practical

In 2018 we introduced reusable takeaway cups and rewarded customers with a 10p discount, resulting in thousands fewer cups entering the waste stream.

In 2019 we replaced 2 ply napkins with smaller counter napkins made from recycled bleach free paper.

Drinking straws as a rule we don't use and withdrew freely available straws in 2018, however if a customer really needs one, we only use paper straws.

In 2019 we removed plastic cutlery from our catering outlets, saving over 30,000 pieces of plastic entering our waste stream. In 2021 we removed plastic cups from our outlets, and in 2022 we removed 5,000 plastic milk bottles from our waste stream by buying bulk milk packs (pergals).

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In 2022 we had to revisit takeaway cutlery and introduced sustainable wooden cutlery as we calculated that 8,500 pieces of reusable metal cutlery had been lost over 3 years, despite the catering & cleaning teams regularly visiting faculty kitchens to return stray items.

In 2022 we held our first cracker free Christmas.

Monitor and reduce energy consumption

The main catering facility (Hub) operates using energy efficient induction cooking and has its own solar roof panels enabling it to be self-sufficient. When purchasing larger pieces of equipment, we always consider sustainability; In 2020 our new dishwasher delivered a 13% water saving and a 40% increase in operating performance.

The Hub kitchen and dining area use low energy LED's.

All of the catering team have received 'Green Flash' training, Baxterstoreys sustainability training.

In 2022 we calculated our first ever Scope 3 emissions levels, providing a baseline for future work.

Recycling, the University already has good levels of recycling, in addition the catering outlets also hold specialist bins for recycling coffee cups, coffee pods, crisp packets, batteries. All packaging materials will be recycled.

Ethical trading and supply chain

Supporting local suppliers, supports local communities. Baxterstorey always try and source products locally and use seasonal products, it ensures local communities are supported, created jobs, with produce often being fresher and of better quality as nutritional content has not degraded.

The number of deliveries has reduced from 20 per week to 13 generating a CO2e saving estimated at 30.05 tonnes. We track this target using our monthly KPI reporting process.

Sustainably sourced fish, we exclude fish species identified as most at risk by MCS Marine Conservation Society. Tuna: we only use pole caught tuna which ensures no other species are harmed.

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We only sell Fair Trade triple certified coffee, with used grounds being offered to customers for use on their gardens, & any surplus being used in the campus grounds or going to a local farm for composting.

Baxterstorey signed up to our Modern Slavery policy and all of the catering teams are paid as a minimum the Real Living Wage rate.

Animal welfare, we are working towards the Red Tractor Award and should have met the criteria by early 2023.

Eggs: all of our eggs are free range, and we should have achieved the Good Egg Award in 2023.

Milk: all our fresh milk comes from British dairy farms.

45% of all cleaning products are Eco friendly, and we aim to increase this to 60% by the end of 2023.

Baxterstorey is committed to the UN Global Compact since 2014 and joined the IEMA Corporate Partnership Programme in 2021 which will further help to embed environmental and sustainability skills.

Wherever possible we will purchase replacement crockery made in the UK, our mugs are made in The Potteries region.

Menus

Our menus provide customers with choice, and we continue to promote and raise awareness of sustainable plant-based dishes, by holding 'pop up' offers, running nationwide promotions such as Veganuary and ensuring dishes are always featured first on our menus & at our hot counters.

We've found that by ensuring our menus feature popular sustainable dishes we can encourage people to try something different. We have seen an increase in the sales of plant-based dishes and now 60% of all entree dishes are plant based, translating into 50% of all entrée sales (as Oct 22).

Since 2021 all soup sold in the retail outlets has been plant based.

Our Baxterstorey team apply their EQ initiative, which aims to create a food culture focused on using less animal protein and more plant-based protein, our menus use this approach.

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Menus are seasonal and follow Baxterstoreys food calendar, ensuring chef prioritises & utilises local homegrown seasonal products whenever possible.

50% of our hospitality menus are plant / vegetarian-based options.

We encourage customers to order tap water for hospitality bookings by offering this service free of charge.

Health & wellbeing

The calorific value of foods is available throughout the outlets at all point-of-sale areas.

Water, we would prefer customers to use one of the chilled water dispensers in any of the four catering outlets as a source of water, however, if customers prefer bottled water, we source only UK manufactured bottled water who use only recycled bottles.

Tap water is also available and promoted through our hospitality services at zero cost.

Potatoes and vegetables are cooked without the addition of added salt.

Awards – the catering team are progressing the Food for Life Bronze/Silver award which we hope to achieve during 2023.

Staff training and development, all of the Baxterstorey team have received Green Flash training, this module focuses on all aspects of sustainability.

5. Future challenges and developments

Continue to reduce the reliance on single use disposables wherever practically possible.

We estimate that currently 20K takeaway drinks are served in a single use disposable cup. We have tried rewarding customers with discounts, sold reusable cups at highly discounted rates, removed wherever possible customers access to disposable cups, and provided customers feedback on our progress to eliminate single use cups, yet we are still unable to phase them out completely. Data suggests that changing customers behaviour by discounting is not effective and levying an additional charge to discourage use is, as demonstrated in the reduction in single use plastic carrier bags across UK retail sector, a more productive route.

Our suggestion is:

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- From a date to be agreed to start to implement a 25p charge for a disposable cup/lid (this is the current cost price)
- Then two months after (agreed date) withdraw all disposable cups.
- Using a reusable cup will become the default for all drinks, whether it be a china cup, or a customer using their own reusable takeaway cup.
- Catering will continue to provide customers with a cost-effective reusable takeaway cup should they not already own one.
- Both the catering and cleaning teams will continue to return stray crockery which has made its way into office kitchen areas.
- In order for this change to be successful we require the support and buy in from key stakeholders including the sustainability team, VC, STEM & customers.
- We do not want the change to be perceived as being driven by the contract caterers or estates team, it needs to be part of the wider OU sustainability drive.
- An effective communication plan is needed to ensure staff and students are fully engaged.

Eliminating single use takeaway boxes

We estimate that currently 15K single use boxes are used per year, whilst we are using the most sustainable box (recycled paper/plant based) due to the contamination of food residue these items enter our waste stream. As part of our ambition to prevent waste we would like to:

- Engage with users and academics and identify and agree the most sustainable reusable system which will allow customers to take food away, and the caterer to operate effectively.
- Once agreed we will need to get the support and buy in from key stakeholders including the sustainability team, VC, STEM & customers.
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- An effective communication plan is needed to ensure staff and students are fully engaged.

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Bottled or canned drinks?

There are conflicting reports indicating that plastics is more environmentally friendly than aluminium cans and vice versa. We would like to engage with the subject matter experts within the OU to look specifically at current purchasing with a view to agreeing the most sustainable products without impacting on customer choice.

Catering Communication

Feedback via the sustainability team is that customers are unclear about the achievements and actions taken by catering. We would like to engage with the communications team with a view to updating and rebranding the catering webpage.

Catering team to hold sustainability pop up events to keep customers updated on achievements.

6 Monitoring and reviewing

Hold regular updates with a member of the Baxterstorey sustainability team to ensure the contract is at the forefront of initiatives.

Regular meetings with OU sustainability team

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