

Plastics Action Plan

2022-2025



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1. Introduction

As signatories to the UK Plastics Pact, UWE Bristol is committed to eliminating all non-essential single-use plastics and to meeting recycling and reuse targets by 2025. These are; by 2025:

- a. 100% of plastics packaging to be reusable, recyclable, or compostable
- b. 70% of plastics packaging effectively recycled or composted
- c. Take actions to eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use packaging items through redesign, innovation or alternative (reuse) delivery models
- d. 30% average recycled content across all plastics packaging.

This fits within our wider Strategy 2030 commitments:



UWE Bristol has also pledged to be carbon neutral as an organisation, with net-zero emissions of green-house gases by 2030 and to reduce waste generation through the setting of clear plans and targets within the University’s environmental management system.

2. Background and work to date

The use of plastic packaging and plastic products is ubiquitous. It brings many benefits, for example in extending the shelf-life of food and enabling modern medical practice. However, the increasing volume and variety of plastic products and polymers, and the inability of existing systems to return all of it to the economic cycle means that it has significant environmental impacts through its durability once it enters the natural environment. Plastics consumption also has an impact on our carbon emissions due to the use of fossil fuels throughout its lifecycle. Plastics have become embedded in the operation of the University. For example, plastics are pervasive in our food and drink service packaging,

incoming goods supply packaging, stationery supplies, medical equipment, information technology, and estates fixtures and furniture. To date, the University and the Students' Union have carried out various actions to minimise the negative environmental impacts of plastics. Some examples within the food and drink packaging arena include:

- a transition away from non-recyclable plastic food packaging and single-use beverage cups to compostable food service disposables;
- promotion of refillable drinks containers including the introduction of a 20p levy on hot beverages served in disposable coffee cups;
- installation of a fleet of water refill stations across the estate;
- selling reusable coffee cups at cost;
- elimination of plastic bags at the Fresher's Fair; and
- elimination of plastic straws in all catering outlets.

To better understand the University's plastics consumption an annual plastics survey was undertaken in 2019 and again in 2020. This identified common single-use plastics items from across UWE Bristol. Information from these surveys is based on the perceptions of those who chose to report.

As part of a suite of plans to address our Strategy 2030 commitments, UWE Bristol developed a [Circular Economy Plan](#). This covers several material lifecycles with particularly high associated carbon emissions and/or sustainability risks (e.g., food/food waste, electrical and electronic equipment, clothing, furniture, paper, and construction material). Applying circular economy principles to these materials' influenceable lifecycles will reduce our scope 3 carbon emissions through reduced consumption and waste prevention. This plastics action plan sits underneath the [Circular Economy Plan](#) as a material with an associated high sustainability risk.

3. Which plastics are in scope?

Within scope of non-essential plastics: single-use plastics including all products made wholly or partly of petrochemical or plant derived plastics and typically used once for only a short period of time before being disposed of.

Examples of plastics that are in scope	Examples of plastics that are out of scope
Takeaway boxes, plastic drinks bottles, plastics drinking cups, disposable hot beverage cups and lids, cutlery, straws, stirrers, disposable wipes, promotional give-aways, containers for cleaning products, plastics wrap, and polystyrene, (including the packaging for food and ICT materials).	Single-use plastics used in healthcare educational settings or laboratory settings, such as petri dishes and syringes. Single-use plastics purchased elsewhere by staff, students and visitors and brought to site. Plastics used in construction and infrastructure (e.g., pipework)

Lab plastics will be addressed through the LEAF sustainable labs programme. Other plastics deemed out of scope will still be subject to actions to bring about greater resource circularity in line with the wider [UWE Bristol Circular Economy Plan](#). The actions outlined below refer to in scope non-essential single use plastics.

4. Actions to reduce plastics use

These actions are outlined more fully in the working tracker document which provides metrics and time scales. As part of our regular annual sustainability reporting, progress on the actions in the Tracker will be reported. This will allow us to monitor progress and track the effectiveness of actions.

Engagement

The University will use its research and teaching activities to build awareness and engagement amongst students, employees, partners, and the public about the issues associated with the use of plastics products.

1. Establish plastics action group with plastics action ambassadors to further identify actions to reduce and remove single-use plastics and to promote and oversee progress on these actions.
2. Scope the options for availability / provision of reusable alternatives for staff and students
3. Establish communications to increase staff and student engagement.

Data

The University monitors its waste quantities but does not have separate plastics data as plastics are collected comingled with other dry recyclables. In 2018 the University estimated that 180 tonnes of plastics waste were produced (30 tonnes segregated for recycling and 150 tonnes disposed of via the general waste stream). Based on Defra conversion factors approximately 600 tonnes of carbon emissions are associated with the production and disposal of this quantity of plastics.

4. Devise method for accurately estimating plastics waste volumes and disposal routes
5. Require and audit end destination data from waste removal companies
6. Devise method for measuring or accurately estimating incoming plastic to establish baseline figures for plastics identified in 2019-20 plastics survey.
7. Aggregate data from the Procurement, Hospitality, Printing and Stationary Services, and the Students' Union annually.
8. Working with the Procurement and Hospitality teams and other major plastics users (e.g., labs), establish targets for the removal of all non-essential single-use plastics for 2022-2025.
9. Refine and repeat plastics survey annually.
10. Investigate devising method for monitoring recycled content in purchased material.

Avoidance or Replacement

Measures to reduce and eliminate single-use plastics must be considered, well-researched and transparent in their rationale to reduce the risk of unintended negative consequences (e.g., reduced hygiene, increased food waste, or increased lifecycle impacts of alternative materials). The use of plastics in some applications is appropriate and can offer the most sustainable solution. We need to be aware of the limitations of supply chain capacity to deliver alternative product delivery systems. The University and the Students' Union will take consideration of the waste hierarchy and, circular economy principles when making strategic decisions on the use of plastics.

11. Identify and prioritise opportunities to eliminate single-use plastics from UWE Bristol operations.
12. The University and the Students' Union will consider the lifecycle impacts of the materials it uses - including plastics - and in such consideration explore opportunities for student involvement via teaching, learning and research.
13. Encourage (via UWE Estates and Facilities Design Guide & tender processes) high secondary material content in material inputs – e.g., recycled plastics in tarmac, floor tiles, furniture etc. These need to be assessed for any negative secondary effects such as release of microplastics.
14. The University and The Student Union will encourage sector purchasing consortia to consider how single-use plastics can be discouraged through the tender specification process and will engage with the National Union of Students and sector environmental bodies to promote awareness and sector engagement.
15. Encourage circularity of materials through increased recycling rates and decreased contamination of materials.

5. Plastics Action Plan contributions to Strategy 2030

Transforming Futures Sustainability Commitments	How this plan impacts on these
Be carbon neutral as an organisation, with net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced CO₂e emissions through elimination of unnecessary material consumption – i.e. from reduced “procurement of goods and services” and waste disposal
Work through the ISO 14001 standard to set clear targets and plans to reduce water and energy use, cut waste generation including food waste, and support biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cutting waste generation through avoided consumption of single-use-plastics ISO14001 processes will be used as a framework to embed material sustainability standards and to monitor progress
As signatories to the UK Plastics Pact, eliminate all but essential single-use plastic and meet the 2025 targets for recycling and reuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly addressed by this plan
Establish all our campuses as clean air and smoke-free zone.	
Invest in and secure year-on-year improvement in travel sustainability for staff, students and visitors.	
Work with our students to explicitly address climate change and environmental challenges through our teaching, learning and curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion of real-world plastics-related circular economy challenges and solutions into the curriculum. Articulating linkage between circular economy and climate action.
Support research that addresses issues relating to climate change, environmental challenges and biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing real-world plastics-related circular economy challenges and solutions through UWE research community. Linking UWE Bristol research community to UK Plastic Pact research opportunities.