

UWE BRISTOL STATEMENT ON THE USE OF MATERIALS DERIVED FROM THE BODY COVERING OF ANIMALS.

In scope: This Statement covers the use, for any purpose, by the University of the following materials: Animal skins, including leather, hides and other skins (such as reptile skin); wool; mohair; cashmere and pashmina; and feathers. In this document the term Skin Hair Feathers (SHF) will be used as shorthand for this encompassing definition.

Introduction

UWE Bristol's Environmental Sustainability Policy commits the University to minimise its impacts on the environment and to use its teaching, research, estates operations and supply chain to extend its influence through the lifecycle of our activities to derive both environmental sustainability benefits and business benefits.

UWE Bristol strongly supports research and teaching activities that meet the highest ethical standards, including that which involves animals. The University requires all activities involving animals, or animal by-products, whether undertaken by staff or students, to be based upon the underpinning principle of appropriate respect for life through the replacement, refinement and reduction of animal use. The University expects all staff and students engaged in research and educational activities to comply with both the letter and the spirit of legislation, regulation, best practice and professional and ethical guidelines. UWE Bristol will always encourage, as part of research or teaching, the development of new understandings, methods, techniques or equipment to improve ethical practice, including animal welfare.

The University recognises that it is sometimes appropriate that SHF should be used. Sometimes there is no viable alternative, or the alternative is evidenced as ethically or environmentally less acceptable. Equally, the use of such materials in research and teaching can sometimes be justified. One example might be where such materials are used in animal conservation research, or where essential to teach students conservation skills. However, the University's aim is to restrict use of materials where sound ethical and environmental practice cannot be assured, in line with the [3Rs](#) (Replace Reduce Refine).

In this context, the University's position in relation to the use of SHF is as follows:

1. All SHF should, wherever possible, be ethically sourced.
2. All research and teaching activities *intentionally* involving animals and animal by-products (ABPs) must have a *favourable opinion*¹ from the University's Animal Welfare and Ethics Sub-Committee (AWESC) prior to these materials being brought onto UWE premises or used by UWE staff or students under the auspices of UWE. For educational use and student research, obtaining this is the role of the Lead Academic or Supervisor, but students will be expected to engage with this process, such that an application can be made at least six weeks before the start date of the proposed activity. This deadline is in line with all of UWE's research ethics committees. For activities and materials covered by an AWESC Safe System of Work (SSoW), this will usually be a streamlined application process. This will also allow the University to register the use of ABPs with the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), hence an application must always be made and the source of the material declared.
3. For estates operations and supply chain use, the purchasing of SHF will be in line with this Statement.

¹Favourable opinion refers to either approval of a full application to AWESC or relevant AWESC Safe System of Work (SSoW), and if working with an ABP, that this is on the approved DEFRA list for the campus where the work will be carried out.

4. There are certain materials that the University will not permit the use of, for reasons of legislation or regulation, or the excessive negative environmental or human health impact, or where it is widely accepted that manufacture causes harm to animals, unless approved by relevant scrutiny. Use of the following ABPs is unlikely to receive approval, unless there are significant animal conservation or animal welfare benefits:
 - Any part of an endangered animal², unless there is no alternative. Such use must be approved by AWESC as appropriate and within the law, before materials are sourced.
 - Fur from any animal.
 - Any product obtained from the live plucking of animals, except for those covered in a relevant SSoW.
 - Merino wool sourced from a source supplier which practices mulesing.Sourcing of such materials will be kept under review, although animal welfare will always be a priority. As practice improves, it may be possible in the future to ethically source these materials.
5. Wherever possible, wool should comply with the requirements of the *Responsible Wool Standard* <https://responsiblewool.org/> (adequate justification for alternate supplies must be given).
6. Wherever possible, feathers to comply with the requirements of the *Responsible Down Standard* <https://responsibledown.org/> (adequate justification for alternate supplies must be given).
7. Leather used should have a UK only supply chain, or clear, unequivocal evidence that animal welfare, environmental, and human standards in the production of the leather are at least equivalent to that which would apply in the UK.
8. Recycled ABP materials may be used in research or teaching, but AWESC will judge these on a case-by-case basis, and will consider issues including age of the product, provenance, proposed use, compliance with the law and DEFRA regulations and justification. Use of recycled goods made from ABPs will be covered where appropriate in the relevant SSoW.
9. SHF often have significant negative environmental, human and animal welfare costs. Use of these materials will therefore be strictly limited within the activities of the University. However, it is recognised that there are some uses which are at present largely unavoidable, such as safety footwear or medical equipment. For all other non-research or teaching uses, the University will not permit SHF which do not comply with these guidelines. This will be incorporated in the *Design Guide*, relevant to new UWE infrastructure.
10. The University encourages the use of innovative vegan products where there is evidence that their production is not more detrimental to the environment than the ABP being replaced.
11. Training and awareness: where taught programme students will or may use SHF, they will receive information at the outset in relation to the University's requirements upon them in this respect; what is and is not permitted. This will include the background and rationale in relation to the law, and environmental, and human and animal welfare consequences of the use of these materials. Materials sourced by students will need to comply with UWE guidelines and approval processes before they are brought on to UWE premises and/or used, and all ABPs will be disposed of appropriately after use.

Statement approved by

UWE Animal Welfare and Ethics Sub-Committee. Date 24th June 2025

UWE Sustainability Executive Committee. Date 6th November 2025

²endangered animal as defined by [IUCN](#)