



# Returning to work on site Oxford University Environmental Sustainability



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# 1. Introduction

The University of Oxford is committed to making changes to accommodate new ways of working that improve sustainability and wellbeing, following the lessons learned during the pandemic. The biggest of these changes involves introducing hybrid forms of working for professional services staff.

The Government's work from home order upended the traditional way of working for many people at the University. This shed light on the potential benefits for environmental sustainability, wellbeing, and equality.

In March 2021, the University approved our new Environmental Sustainability Strategy. This identifies learning the lessons of the pandemic as one of ten priority areas – others include carbon reduction, biodiversity resource use and travel.

The New Ways of Working project (NWW) explores how we should work in the future, building on our experiences during the pandemic.

We have compiled suggestions on how to rethink and change your working practices.

This guide offers ideas on several aspects of environmental sustainability that teams across the University can apply immediately. In each area, there are some easy-to-implement suggestions – the 'low-hanging fruit' – and others that require more time, effort, and resources. The actions are arranged for Beginners, Advanced and Moving forward.

We invite teams to choose the elements that suit them best and implement them on a schedule that works for them. This can be done for departments, buildings, colleges, or local smaller teams.

**Appendix 1 offers steps that individuals can take as well as supporting information.**

We welcome any feedback on this guide and are happy to provide support throughout this process.

## 1.1 Join Green Impact

The most efficient and systematic way to improve environmental sustainability in your team is to join the [Green Impact Scheme](#).

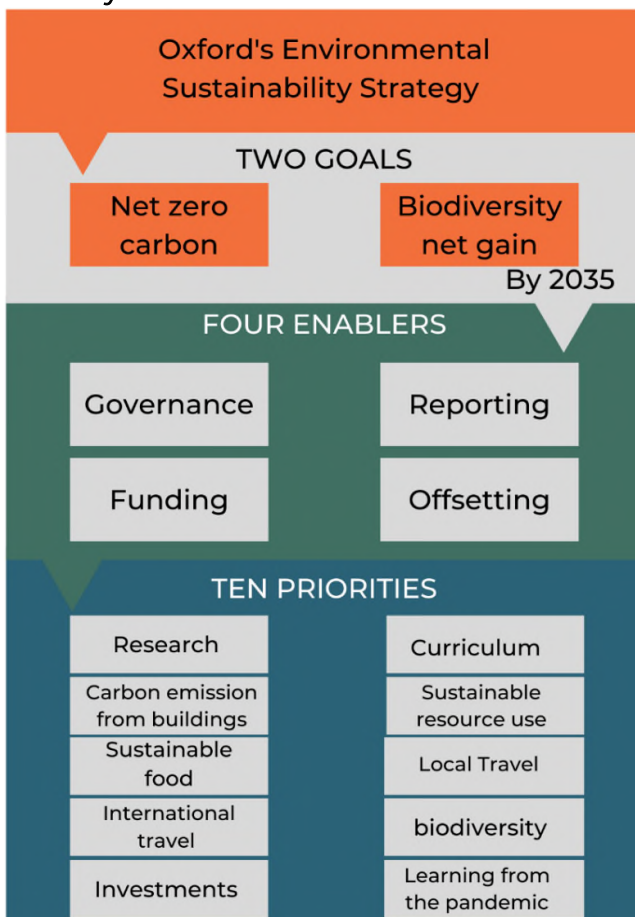
Green Impact is a national scheme that you can tailor to provide simple and effective ways for staff and students to improve the sustainability of their building, department, or college. There is also a specialised scheme for laboratories.

Green Impact is as much about changing behaviour as it is about making physical improvements. It is a way of thinking and acting in our everyday lives to build on continuous improvement in our workplace. With over 150 teams over the years and thousands of actions initiated and delivered by these teams, we make a significant change. Local teams are in the best position to understand the unique practices and needs of their departments, and the ways to motivate positive change within their realm.

To read more about Green Impact and get support in starting a team, please visit [the Green Impact webpage](#).

## 1.2 Understand our Environmental Sustainability Strategy

Oxford University’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy was approved by Council on 15 March 2021. The strategy sets two ambitious targets: to achieve net zero carbon and to achieve biodiversity net gain, both by 2035.



The University’s Environmental Sustainability Strategy

You can read the full strategy document and the University’s commitments on [our webpage](#).

### 1.3 Learn from the pandemic

During the pandemic, student interns in the Environmental Sustainability team helped us monitor some of the resulting changes. Apart from the immediate effects, this demonstrates our capability to adjust and the cumulative result of our small actions across the University.



The environmental impacts of Covid-19, May 2020  
 Credit: Zaynab Sarguroh, St Hugh's College, Environmental Sustainability intern, Spring 2020

#### Across Oxford University:

- We saved 7,462,130 sheets of paper in April, May, and June 2020; that represents a 93% reduction in paper use over lockdown.
- Our reduction in flights lowered our CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions by 7,500 tonnes. During the past year, we saved about 30,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions by avoiding business flights.

- We sent 1,671,552 private chat messages in May, compared to 139,036 in February.
- We went from holding 22 meetings a day on Teams to 3,424.

How can we use what we have learned to develop a new approach to the way we work?

## 2. Beginners

### Teams starting their sustainability journey

**We welcome everyone to get involved in environmental sustainability within their office building, department, or college.**

**In fact, we need everyone to get involved in some way to maximise our impact in the University and ensure we achieve our goals to reach net zero carbon and biodiversity net gain by 2035.**

If you are a team manager, team administrator or group member with a passion for sustainability, you are in the perfect position to support change that will benefit your team and the University community.

Here are a few steps to introduce environmental sustainability as part of your day-to-day work routine, Many of them are building on changes we've already made due to the pandemic:

#### 1. Resource use:

- We adjusted to a huge reduction of paper use during lockdown. Can we keep this up? What are the processes that you can now do without using paper? Think about admissions, HR, compliance, Follow-Me printing.
- Switch to 100% recycled paper as a default in your team, department, or building. See our recommended Oracle Item numbers in Appendix 2.
- Prefer the use of tap water in meetings and event over purchasing bottled water.
- Use [WARPit](#) to find second-hand items available within the University. You can post unwanted items to offer them to others or claim items that are no longer needed. Make a habit of checking WARPit before purchasing office equipment.
- Switch to Fairtrade coffee and tea in your building. See our recommended Oracle Item numbers in Appendix 2. Oxford University is a Fairtrade University. We aim to expand the use of Fairtrade items to ensure that our consumption helps farmers, producers, and the environment.

- Buy consumables and stationery quarterly or termly to save up requests and minimise ordering frequency. This reduces packaging and transport impacts.
- Organise an “amnesty event” for stationery and IT devices. Many of us have a surplus that can be used by others and kept for communal use.
- Remind your colleagues about waste and recycling in the University. Consider replacing personal bins with waste and recycling ones in a central location. See our waste guide for common items in Appendix 3.

## 2. Sustainable food

- The pandemic has given us the opportunity to rethink our sustainability impact. Food is responsible for 25% of global carbon emissions and a leading cause of biodiversity loss. Oxford research concludes that reducing our meat and dairy intake are the best ways to reduce our impact.
- Choose [plant-based or vegetarian food](#) for meetings or events. The University’s primary caterer follows sustainability guidance and offers a variety of plant-based hosting options.
- Avoid using bottled water in events or meetings you host. The University caterer offers jugs of tap water when specified. You may need to contact the caterer directly to arrange for this.
- Replace all disposable products in the staff kitchen, including plates, cups, and utensils, and use reusable items instead.

## 3. International travel

- During the pandemic, we have saved 30,000 tonnes of carbon emissions thanks to our reduction in flights.
- Consider the environmental implications of business travel. Visit our [travel site](#) and consult our [Business Travel Toolkit](#) for more information.

## 4. Carbon emissions from University buildings

- Conduct an energy audit of your area. Is there equipment left on unnecessarily? Perhaps label equipment that is regularly left on, letting colleagues know that it can be switched off. See suggestion in Appendix 5.
- During the hot weather (and where safe to do so), leave windows open overnight to allow buildings to cool naturally. Make sure to consult your building manager to work in line with security arrangements.
- Heat to 20 degrees and cool to 24. Make sure you discuss any changes with building occupiers, asking them to dress accordingly.

## 5. Other

- When planning an event, consult our sustainable event guide.

- Remind, advise, and support your team members about the individual steps they can take for environmental sustainability. See Appendix 1 for the relevant information.
- Add environmental sustainability information to your website or email signature. [Ask us](#) for resources if needed.

### 3. Advanced

These suggestions are aimed at teams that have addressed the beginner section and those currently or previously working with the Green Impact scheme.

These are items to work towards in the coming year.

#### 1. Resource use:

- Identify wasteful activities and agree on achievable goals for your building.
- Consider a policy of one computer per person, i.e., a laptop or a desktop, not both (ideally a laptop with a single monitor as they are more energy efficient than a desktop with dual monitors).
- Switch to more eco-friendly cleaning products in your building. See our recommended Oracle Item numbers in Appendix 2.
- Work with your team's administrator or procurement officer to make sustainable purchasing choices on items you commonly use. You can use the 'Green Item' filter on Oracle R12 to implement changes in the option list.  
(Use the search function then apply filter > select 'Green Item' from drop-down > select Go)
- Consider installing hand dryers instead of using paper towels. Specify dryers without hot air elements, and make sure you consult your facilities manager to ensure this is done safely.
- Work with your facilities or building manager to monitor your recycling rate (and costs). Take steps to reduce waste and increase recycling.
- Remind your colleagues about waste and recycling in the University. Replace personal bins with waste and recycling ones in a central location. [Ask us](#) for suitable signs and stickers to help reinforce this message.

#### 2. Carbon emissions from University buildings

- Work with your facilities or building manager to monitor and record your energy and water consumption and take steps to reduce it. Many buildings record energy data on a half



hourly basis, providing valuable insights into energy waste. [Ask us](#) for login instructions on how to do so.

- Understand whether your building is run efficiently. Often changes to automatic controls are possible via the Building Management System (BMS).
- Consider investing in energy efficiency infrastructures, such as efficient lighting, better insulation, or improved building controls. It is simple to apply for funding from the Carbon Management Fund.

### 3. Local travel

- Support your team in moving to more sustainable travel practices by providing pool bus passes for business travel across the city and reminding them about the University's mobile bike mechanic services, a cycle loan scheme with discounts at local bike shops and free cycle training. See our [travel website](#) for more information.
- Consider whether your cycle parking, showering and lockers are up to scratch – speak to the travel team about 50% match funding from the Green Travel Fund to support your department improve its active travel offer.
- Buy pool pedal or e-bikes for team use. You can apply for a grant towards 50% of the cost through the University Green Travel Fund.

### 4. Other

- Implement Walk-and-Talk meetings.
- Support, recognise and show appreciation for your Green Impact Team volunteers and members!
- Set up an occasional internal event (Teams meeting, for instance) with an environmental agenda. See resources on the [Environmental Sustainability site](#).

## 4. Moving forward

In this section, we offer methodologies to improve the environmental impact of your day-to-day work.

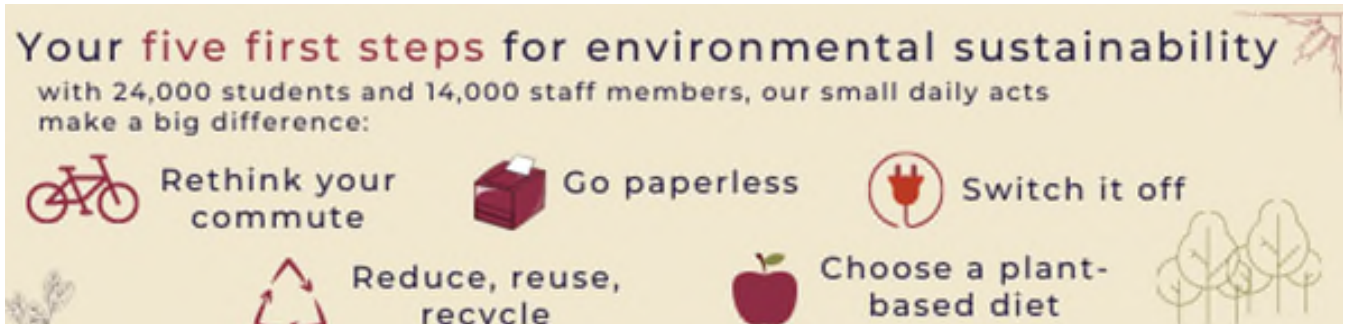
Environmental sustainability is an ongoing process. We understand that each team has unique needs and common practices, and you know best what improvements would suit you.

- Set up an environmental committee in your department or building to address these issues on an ongoing basis
- Set targets and goals in your most impactful environmental areas
- Identify your area's key activities and processes and their positive and negative environmental implications.
  - Walking around your site might help, or alternatively, you can speak to a range of staff and students to get a snapshot. For your key activities, consider how carrying out that activity affects the environment and whether there are potential alternatives. Plan to implement doable options.
- Work with your building manager to apply a comprehensive shutdown policy to reduce energy waste.
- Throughout the year, the Environmental Sustainability team addresses different issues with campaigns, training, and options for meetups. Members of your team are welcome to participate in any of those. Join our [Teams group](#) and [newsletter](#) to get the relevant information, and make sure to pass it on.
- Embed environmental sustainability into your department or college's existing welcome pack and staff or student handbook, as well as into any induction sessions.
- Review options to add sustainability clauses into contracts that request goods and services, such as a local caterer (if different from the main University caterer), cleaning services, printing, etc.
- Consider an occasional event relating to environmental sustainability. This can be part of regular teams meeting or a designated event. Consult our website for resources and guidance on setting up such an event.
- Eliminate the use of single-use plastic in your department or team.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Individual behaviour change

As an individual, the following five steps are the first meaningful changes you can apply:



Your five first steps for Environmental Sustainability

You can read more about each step and the support we offer to implement it on our [NWW Sustainability webpage](#).

**Greening your commute.** Could you cycle or walk all or part of your journey?

**A quick tip:** If your commute is long or challenging, consider an e-bike. The University offers an interest-free loan, and local shops offer discounts on new bicycles for University staff.

There are also significant discounts and season ticket loan schemes for public transport. See [our travel website](#) for more information.

**Switch off at the plug** and switch off lights when not in use

**A quick tip:** Keep a jumper in the office – reducing your heating by just one degree can save up to 8% of energy.

**Choose a plant-based diet**, even if only two or three times a week. If you are eating out, explore a new vegetarian outlet (or dishes) in your area.

**A quick tip:** Drink tap water and avoid plastic bottles

**Think twice before you print.** During the pandemic, we reduced the paper consumption of the University by 93%. Can we keep it up?

**Reduce your consumption** – think about how things will be disposed of when you buy them. Do you really need it? Can you get it second-hand?

**Use reusable items** such as coffee cups, shopping bags, water bottles and lunch boxes.

**A quick tip:** Think of your daily routine and plan your day – a coffee cup for grabbing a drink on the way to work, a water bottle with lunch instead of buying plastic, a shopping bag for going to the supermarket on your way home, etc.

Make sure you [recycle your waste](#).

## Appendix 2- recommended items and Oracle number

### 1) 100% recycled paper with EU Eco Label certification:

#### A4

- White paper for formal documents; Office Depot Oracle Item number: 5226498
- Off-white paper for internal use; Steinbeis Oracle Item number: 3604347

#### A3

- White paper for formal documents; Steinbeis Oracle Item number: 5713434
- Off-white paper for internal use; Office Depot Oracle Item number: 5226489

### 2) Fairtrade supplies:

- Breakfast teabags; Supplier Item number: 543579
- Granulated sugar; Supplier Item number: 2074676
- Instant coffee; Supplier Item number: 525018
- Decaff instant coffee; Supplier Item number: 5562207

### 3) Ecological cleaning supply

- We recommend using the following widely available brands that are on Oracle R12:
- Ecover hand soap; Supplier Item number: 531326
- Ecover washing up liquid; Supplier Item number: 1001812
- Ecover all-purpose cleaner; Supplier Item number: 5384196

## Appendix 3 – Waste guide

With 24,000 students and 14,000 members of staff, we generate a considerable amount of waste. Managing this waste responsibly is a key focus – we aim to reduce the amount of waste created in the first place and reuse and recycle as much as possible across the University. This, in turn, will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and waste disposal costs.

The waste hierarchy is an effective way to think about how we manage waste: the best option is to prevent waste from being produced in the first place, and the least preferred option is disposal or landfill. The higher up the waste hierarchy our actions are, the better for the environment.



The waste hierarchy upside-down pyramid

The University dispose of its non-hazardous waste using three main waste streams: Dry Mixed Recycling DMR; general waste; and, where relevant, food waste. The bin should be clearly marked and easily accessible in convenient locations. [Contact the sustainability team](#) for stickers if needed.

### Dry Mixed Recycling

DMR includes plastic bottles, paper, cardboard, metal cans etc. Glass must not be placed in DMR.

For more information on what can and cannot be placed in DMR see the [University's Waste Guide](#).

Unless there are operational space restrictions, all sites must recycle waste. The University has a single supplier for DMR – this is Select Environmental.

### General Waste

Waste that is non-hazardous and cannot be reused or recycled can be placed in the General Waste bin. General waste must not include liquids, electrical items, or hazardous waste.

If you are not sure how to dispose of an item, please consult our guide to the most [common items for recycling](#).

Item	How to dispose
Glass	For substantial amounts of recyclable glass (excluding pyrex or glass contaminated with hazardous materials or substances), Select Environmental can provide a glass recycling bin. Email <a href="mailto:oxford@selectenviro.co.uk">oxford@selectenviro.co.uk</a> or call 0118 975 9000 or 07708804333. Lesser amounts of non-hazardous glass may be disposed of through the general waste collection.
Books and binded printed material	If they cannot be reused, where there are just one or two items these can be placed in the dry mixed recycling (DMR). Books or texts that incorporate other material such as metal bindings that cannot be separated must be placed in the general waste bin.

Item	How to dispose
Light bulbs	<p>Many of the light bulbs are on the Hazardous waste list. Disposal should be done via the safety office.</p> <p>Ordinary tungsten and halogen light bulbs: can be disposed of in the general waste bin.</p>
Cartridges	<p>Ink cartridges are classified as waste as they need to be reprocessed or refilled to be used again.</p> <p>In many cases, you can recycle toners through the XMA Recycling Programme.</p> <p>You can contact XMA to arrange a collection point through 01635 588 159.</p>
Disposable cups and utensils	<p>Please ensure that you only place empty coffee cups in the DMR bin. Liquid waste contaminating DMR can cause a whole truck of recycling to be rejected, and a fine levied on the waste contractor.</p>
Electrical waste	<p>Electrical waste is known as WEEE. Some electrical waste may also be hazardous.</p> <p>Please speak to your building manager or similar, or contact Select Environmental by email at <a href="mailto:oxford@selectenviro.co.uk">oxford@selectenviro.co.uk</a> or call 0118 975 9000 or 07708804333.</p>
Bulky waste	<p>Where suitable, you can advertise the items on the University's reuse system WARPit.</p> <p>Where the item cannot be reused, the department can arrange for collection by a suitably licensed waste contractor, including Select Environmental</p>

# Version 1.1

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The original document is held by the Environmental Sustainability team, Estates Services, University of Oxford. The most current copy is available on the sustainability website.

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