

Letter COMMUNICATION ON ENGAGEMENT (CoE)

Period covered by this Communication on Engagement:
30 November 2018 to 30 November 2021

Part I. Statement of Continued Support by the Vice-Chancellor

16.11.21

To our stakeholders:

I am pleased to confirm that The Open University reaffirms its support to the United Nations Global Compact and its Ten Principles in the areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-Corruption. This is our Communication on Engagement with the United Nations Global Compact. We welcome feedback on its contents.

In this Communication on Engagement, we describe the actions that our organisation has taken to support the UN Global Compact and its Principles as suggested for an organisation like ours. We also commit to sharing this information with our stakeholders using our primary channels of communication.

Sincerely yours,



Professor Tim Blackman
Vice-Chancellor

The Open University

The Open University (OU) promotes social justice by making learning accessible to all, regardless of circumstance. Founded in 1969 on the principle 'to reach more students with life changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society' and the mission of being 'Open to People, Places, Methods and Ideas', a philosophy which is as relevant today as it was more than 50 years ago.

In achieving our mission, we are committed to, and are guided by, the enduring OU values of inclusivity, innovation, and responsiveness.

- **Inclusive:** The OU plays a unique role in society, making higher education open to all. The radical open admissions policy of no entry qualifications enables the OU to reach some of the most marginalised and hard to reach people around the world. Around 1 in 6 students at the OU (27,237) has a disability, and 3 in 4 students earn while they learn.
- **Innovative:** The OU's world leading research covers a wide range of areas, including teaching strategies and educational technologies, ensuring that materials produced are effective and appropriate for large-scale open and distance learning. An early pioneer in the use of modern learning technologies, the OU has always taken full advantage of the internet and pivoted to online working quickly during the pandemic. The OU's use of widely available technology enables students to learn in ways that are flexible, all-inclusive, supportive, and social. OpenLearn, the OU's free distance learning platform is approaching 100 million learners since its launch 15 years ago (98 million as of November 2021) and has recently marked its 2 millionth course completion. OU research is designed to have impact, influence policy and practice, and change lives for the better. Nearly three quarters (72%) of the OU's research was assessed as world-leading or internationally excellent in the UK Research Excellence Framework 2014.
- **Responsive:** In 2019/20, around 175,719 students were registered with the OU, many of them accessing course materials on their smartphones and tablets, studying flexibly when and where it suits them best. The OU is responsive to the needs of students, employers, communities and society at large.

The Open University and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The launch of the *UN Decade of Action* marks a clear consensus on the need for urgent whole-society and multi-sector action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. There is increasing recognition of the critical role that universities play through their teaching, research and knowledge exchange. The 2018 introduction of the *Times Higher Education World Impact Rankings* assessing the contribution to the SDGs; and the 2020 *Knowledge Exchange Framework* reflect this importance.

The OU sees its engagement with the *UN Global Compact* and the *Ten Principles* as a key part of demonstrating its commitment and actions towards achieving the SDGs. We are committed to supporting and promoting the *Global Compact's* core values in the areas of human rights, labour standards, the environment and anti-corruption.

Our commitment to environmental and social sustainability will continue to run through our education, research, enterprise, curriculum and public engagement work. Our global presence and profile give us

a unique opportunity to drive thought leadership and lead mass public engagement for achieving sustainability.

The OU has always been focused on social transformation. Our open admissions policy has expanded higher education for all in the UK over the last 50 years. Our work to revolutionise open education reaches millions of learners every year, with over 17 million people accessing free learning resources on our [OpenLearn](#) platform last year, and through our unique public education partnership with the BBC producing important programmes such as *Blue Planet II* and *Planet Earth*.

The OU's mission combines accessible teaching underpinned by robust academic research. This ethos of bridging research, teaching and professional practice is central to all we do, and each of these elements combines to address our social mission. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of development policy and practice where the OU is uniquely positioned to undertake projects that directly relate to the SDGs through three inter-connected units:

- The [Centre for the Study of Global Development](#) (CSGD) enables and supports researchers, practitioners, thought leaders and policy makers to share knowledge and research evidence to advance human wellbeing for sustainable development.
- The OU's **Strategic Research Area in [International Development and Inclusive Innovation](#)** is home to world-leading researchers of 'inclusive innovation', applying methodologies and theories in working with poor and marginalised people for a fairer, more sustainable world. It is interdisciplinary, encompassing social, natural, health and engineering sciences.
- The OU's **Development Policy and Practice group (DPP)** is the home of development studies and development management teaching. Since the mid-1990s we have run the Masters in Global Development Management which has been studied in over 100 countries.

With a progressive social mission, a span of expertise across the SDGs, and a growing recognition of the value of open and distance learning to reach marginalised populations at scale, the OU is committed to increasing its contribution towards the goals.

The University is currently in the process of developing its sustainability strategy based on our sustainability vision. The basis of this vision – as laid out on our [sustainability webpages](#) – is that we are dedicated to creating and sharing knowledge and learning to realise social and environmental justice. We see our primary roles in sustainability as:

- An educator – placing sustainability at the heart of our teaching, research and knowledge exchange.
- A business – championing best practice across all four nations of the UK.

The Open University and the UN Global Compact

The OU joined the UN Global Compact in November 2018 as part of our ongoing commitment to sustainability. This Communication on Engagement (CoE) is part of our institutional commitment to transparently demonstrate the actions we have taken, and continue to take, to do business sustainably and responsibly. It reports against the ten principles in four sections: Human Rights, Labour, Environment, and Anti-Corruption.

Human Rights Principles

Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and

Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses

The OU works to ensure that the human rights of its staff, students, and those in its supply chains are fully protected. Our workplace policies and procedures show that we are committed to acting ethically and with integrity in all business relationships and are fully compliant with UK employment law.

As part of our social mission, we believe in the absolute right of all persons, regardless of background to access, participate in, and succeed in education, and our strategies set out a pathway to achieving this.

The OU as a Business - Policies, Strategies and Goals

The OU's *Access, Participation and Success Strategy* provides the University's strategic approach to supporting students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds to access HE and achieve equitable outcomes. An implementation plan to inform the delivery of the Strategy's six strategic priorities was developed in 2020, setting key measurable targets to be achieved in terms of Access, Participation and Success for students from Black and Asian backgrounds, those who have reported Mental Health issues, and students with disabilities.

Our core business is our students, and this strategy supports and respects the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights by supporting students who identify with characteristics associated with underrepresentation and disadvantage. The following documents demonstrate how the University is committed to continuous improvement and working towards equitable outcomes for all students including Black, Asian and minority ethnic diversity, those with disabilities, mental health issues, and from the lowest Index of Mass Deprivation quintile.

- [Access, Participation and Success strategy](#) 2020-2025
- [Access and Participation plan](#) 2020-2025 (p. 17 – 21)

The OU's *Procurement Policy* integrates the protection of human rights, specifically through compliance with equality, diversity and modern slavery legislation ([see statement on Eradicating Modern Slavery in Supply Chains](#)). Responsible procurement is a key principle in our new procurement strategy placing social and environmental responsibility at the heart of procurement activities. Ethical (including equality & diversity) and environmental considerations are embedded into the procurement cycle, targeted to support the University's wider sustainability objectives.

Protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, exploitation, victimisation, abuse, neglect, sexual misconduct and violence is fundamental to creating a safe learning environment. The University's safeguarding policies aim at the creation of a safe environment for children and adults at risk/protected adults, in line with current UK policy, legislation and practice. A specific policy for protection of children, young people and vulnerable/protected adults overseas is also implemented to safeguard the rights of project partners and beneficiaries within our international development programmes. These policies ensure the University is not complicit in human rights abuses and supports and respects the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights.

- [Procurement strategy \(p.5\)](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)

- [Overseas safeguarding policy](#)

Implementation

All staff at the OU undertake mandatory training on the following topics. These cover both institutional policies and UK and international legal requirements on human rights in these areas.

- Safeguarding
- Prevent (Counter Terrorism)
- Equality Essentials

The Open University as an Educator

The OU delivers world class research, teaching and knowledge exchange programmes with practical impact on the protection of human rights globally. Examples of activity are shown below as they relate to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR):

Article 5 - No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment:

The OU's International Development Office works with international partners to support the protection of human rights globally through the development of learning for practitioners:

- We work in partnership with UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Bond and CHS Alliance to create *Advanced Safeguarding Leadership Training* for safeguarding leads in humanitarian and development organisations via three fully interactive MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). The first '*Introduction to Safeguarding in the International Aid Sector*' was launched in April 2021.
- In partnership with FIFA we develop and deliver the FIFA Guardians *Safeguarding in Sports Diploma*, a suite of 5 online courses directed to learners from FIFA's 211 Member Associations (freely available to all), supported by face-to-face residential workshops, to ensure safeguarding leads in the Football community have a strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities in protecting those in their care.

Article 7 - All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law:

The OU Law School is committed to the protection of human rights as defined by the UDHR (UN Declaration of Human Rights), within its teaching, research and knowledge exchange.

- The [Open Justice Centre](#) exists to provide a bridge between The Open University Law School and the community, and between students and the legal profession. It seeks to challenge OU students to apply their legal knowledge and skills in a way that furthers the OU's social justice mission by providing free legal advice, education and guidance to the public.
- The Open Justice Centre, with *Support Through Court*, has developed a free online course on Domestic Abuse which provides useful learning for those working or volunteering in organisations dealing with domestic abuse issues. The course launched in April 2020 and [gained national attention](#) in the UK parliament.
- The OU has developed '[A practical guide to UK human rights and discrimination law](#)': an introductory free online course for anyone who is interested in learning more about human rights and discrimination law.

- The OU Master's degree module W822 '[Business, human rights law and corporate social responsibility](#)' considers how business increasingly conducts its operations with responsibility to its stakeholders including wider society.

Article 6 - Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 13 - Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

Article 14 - Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

The *Justice, Borders and Rights* research stream within the OU's *Citizenship and Governance Strategic Research Area* interrogates the social, cultural and political repercussions of and knowledge production around border practices - issues at the forefront of old and new debates about conflict and global inequalities. Members of this group have made wide ranging contributions to recent debate and policy making in this space:

- A team of academics from the OU led by Dr Tendayi Bloom gave evidence on the topics of student migration and statelessness at UN forums in New York and Vienna that fed into the development of the *UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)* which was signed in December 2018.
- The OU works with the *European Network on Statelessness* and produced a [policy brief](#) to inform the 2019 *UN High level Forum on Sustainability*, setting out how citizenship is relevant to sustainable development, specifically the SDGs, and how the denial of citizenship can restrict access to other human rights such as education and decent work.
- For *Refugee Week* in June 2020, the OU drew together a collection of free public education resources '[Understanding Refugee Experiences](#)' to celebrate refugee contributions to the UK and promote a better understanding of refugee experiences and creativity.

Article 18 - Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion:

- Professor Parvati Raghuram leads a consortium of African universities, UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), and the Global Campaign for Peace Education on the new £1.9m AHRC-funded '[Peace-building and education: decolonising peace education in Africa](#)' project. This project, commenced in April 2020, brings together academics, NGOs and disadvantaged communities in Africa to develop new meaningful knowledges, pedagogies and open-access teaching materials for decolonised peace education, using Arts and Humanities methodologies. It will produce a peace education framework which will be utilised by local communities, educational institutions training teachers, NGOs and peace-building practitioners in Africa, and education policymakers in Africa.
- The [Project for Interdisciplinary Law and Religion Studies \(PILARS\)](#) is run by a team of academics from the OU and international academics researching in the field of Law and Religion. The aim is to provide well-crafted academic analysis of recent law and religion judgments.
- The OU's Law School marks *International Human Rights Day* (10 December) each year. In 2019 it produced [three educational videos](#) exploring the human right to Religious Freedom, Freedom of Expression, and to Privacy.

Article 19 - Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression

- In 2018-2019, the OU's International Development Office worked with the international NGO Oxfam to develop an 8-week online course '[Make Change Happen](#)' to support activists

working in the wider humanitarian and development sectors on how they can better understand power dynamics to positively drive social change, securing human rights globally. The course has been run four times and well over 4,000 people have taken part globally.

Article 26 - Everyone has the right to education

- The OU's open entry policy provides the opportunity for many people who, for whatever reason are unable to attend a traditional face to face university. Our [introductory modules](#) at Level 4 or SCQF7, enable students to develop confidence in their academic ability and study skills to prepare them for further study at the OU. Our [Access programme](#) offers a unique tutoring model, 30 credits at Level 0, aimed at students who have been out of education for some time and need some additional support to help develop their confidence prior to embarking on a full degree programme. Access modules are offered at half the price of standard modules at the OU, and many students benefit from a full fee waiver if household income criteria are met.
- In addition, our work to revolutionise open education reaches millions of learners every year, More than 17 million people accessed free learning resources on our OpenLearn platform last year, (www.open.edu/openlearn/) and through our unique public education partnership with the BBC producing important primetime programmes such as *Blue Planet II*, *Earth From Space*, *Greta Thunberg: A Year to Change the World*, *Project 17*, *School*, *Why Slavery?*, *Country File: Plant Britain*, *Gold Town* and *A Perfect Planet*. This inspires and delivers our sustainability vision to be an educator, placing sustainability at the heart of our teaching, research and knowledge exchange.

Measurement of Outcomes

- The OU is the largest provider of Higher Education for students with disabilities - 27,237 students declared a disability studied with us in 2018/19.
- 32% of students had one A level or a lower qualification at entry
- 25% of OU UK undergraduates live in the 25% most deprived areas of the UK
- The *Domestic Abuse* online course has gained 1538 enrolments from over 28 countries since its launch in April 2020
- More than 4,000 changemakers globally have enrolled in the *Make Change Happen* course since its launch in 2019.

Labour Principles

Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;

Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;

Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour; and

Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation

The OU as a Business – Policies, Strategies and Goals

The OU's *Modern Slavery Policy and Statement* demonstrates our commitment to use all reasonable endeavours to ensure that no modern slavery or human trafficking in any form takes place in our supply chains or in any part of our institution, ensuring we uphold all labour principles.

- [Modern Slavery policy](#)
- [Modern Slavery statement](#)

The OU undertakes due diligence on potential partners and suppliers to ensure it only works with organisations with the highest standards of labour laws. When requests for services or goods go out to tender, the OU requests bidders for information on compliance with fraud, money laundering, child labour, modern slavery, environmental and labour law obligations.

The OU was established to increase access to higher education to all, regardless of background or circumstances. Our mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas – and as such, equality and diversity are at the heart of everything we do. Our [equality statement](#) sets out our vision and key principles for equality.

The OU *Equality Scheme* demonstrates our organisational commitment to developing an inclusive community where people are treated with dignity and respect, where inequalities are challenged, and where we anticipate, and respond positively to, different needs and circumstances, so that everyone can achieve their potential. It sets KPIs for the diversity of staff and equal opportunity for all to participate and achieve in education regardless of background. This feeds into the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

- [Equality Scheme 2018-2022](#)

Implementation

The OU has official and staff-organised groups that support equality, diversity and inclusion for OU staff, ensuring continuous support for the right to collective bargaining and the elimination of discrimination at the University. These groups include:

- Equality Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group - This group has responsibility for the rolling four-year strategy which drives the aims and objectives of the equality scheme.
- Care and Caring Network@OU - A formal corporate network for knowledge exchange around care and caring, the promotion of carers' rights within the OU and the provision of information, advice and guidance in carer-related development.

- Securing Greater Accessibility Coordination Group – Providing advice and guidance on accessibility to module teams, liaising with accessibility experts across the OU and supporting Curriculum Managers in managing requests for reasonable adjustments from disabled students.
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff network - Providing networking opportunities for all BAME staff and promote peer support, confidence building and most of all greater inclusivity.
- Enabling Staff@OU Network - A network for promoting the integration of disabled staff in the workforce, by supporting both disabled staff and their colleagues.
- The International Communities Support Network - staff diversity network for migrants at the OU and is open to all EU nationals, non-UK nationals and UK nationals.
- LGBT+ Staff Network - Aims to respond to social needs and give voice to staff, enabling issues of concern or interest to be shared, raised, and addressed.
- Women@OU Staff Network - An all-inclusive group that works to promote gender equality and raise the profile of women at the OU.
- Transgender Staff Network – Providing a safe space to meet and share experiences for people who live similar lives.
- Neurodiversity Staff Network - Providing a safe space to support all members with different neurological conditions across the four nations.

The OU staff undertake mandatory training on the following topics to deliver the OU Strategy targets:

- *Equality Essentials*
- *Understanding Unconscious Bias* (for all staff involved in recruitment shortlisting and interview panels)

Staff members at the OU can join the recognised trade union for their specific category of staff. Working together in partnership enables the institution to achieve its mission, values, and business strategies and objectives to further enhance the staff and student experience. In addition, the OU has an active [Students Association](#) which enables students to hold the university accountable for the quality of the student experience and of teaching. The University is keen to collaborate and work with colleagues and students collectively.

The OU's Faculty of Business and Law is [a signatory to the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education \(UN PRME\)](#), and through this is committed to provide innovative and distinctive teaching to enable individuals and organisations to achieve their potential and contribute responsibly to society. The faculty has a working group which aims to raise awareness of PRME and the UN SDGs across the faculty, create an environment for engagement, exploration and discussion of the seven PRME principles and how they relate to the faculty's strategic aims. The PRME working group gives presentations, stimulates discussions and produces a mini-newsletter for staff.

The OU is committed to providing free informal learning on issues of national and international importance. One example is the [recently updated online course on Modern Slavery](#), designed to develop an understanding of the international system of human rights protection in relation to modern slavery, and encourage an appreciation of the influence of International Human Rights Law on the development of the domestic system of human rights protection.

Measurement of Outcomes

The OU is committed to transparent reporting of progress and outcomes against protected characteristics.

The [Athena SWAN Charter](#) is a global award that promotes gender equality in Higher Education. Established in 2005 to recognise and advance the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine employment, the charter now includes arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law. Higher Education Institutions can apply as departments and for the whole institution. The OU first attained an institutional bronze award from *Athena SWAN* in 2013 and renewed this in 2016 and again in 2021.

Of the OU's departments (Schools), the *Physical Sciences* and *Engineering and Innovation* schools hold silver awards. *Computing and Communications*, Life, Health and Chemical Sciences, Maths, and Statistics and the OU's *Knowledge Media Institute* hold bronze awards. The OU is committed to ensuring that all Schools hold at least a bronze award by 2024.

The [Disability Confident Scheme](#) is a government scheme that supports employers to make the most of the talents disabled people can bring to the workplace, particularly in recruitment, retention and progression of staff. Disability Confident organisations play a leading role in changing attitudes for the better.

- In July 2020, the OU achieved Level 1 status: Committed. This is valid for 3 years during which time we shall make progress to Level 2 status: Employer and Level 3 status: Leader.

Each year the OU produces equality monitoring reports and data which can be accessed [here](#). This includes reports such as the [Associate Lecturers](#) report, [Internal staff](#) reporting, and [student](#) report on composition of colleagues and students.

The OU is a member of the [Race Equality Charter](#) (REC) process run by *Advance HE* and is progressing its application for a Bronze Award. The REC helps HE institutions to identify and self-reflect on barriers standing in the way of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff and students. It is designed to improve the representation, progression and success of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students within Higher Education.

The OU is committed to reporting on its [Gender Pay Gap](#) and taking action to reduce it. In 2020, the median gender pay gap was 5.7%, this is lower than the sector median of 13.7% for all Higher Education Institutions of a similar size and income, however we believe this gap should not exist at all. The OU has made several commitments towards narrowing the *Gender Pay Gap* by 2022 including:

- Improving the representation of women in senior roles
- Improving managers capability to recruit, manage and develop diverse teams with clear completion targets each year.
- Reviewing the promotion processes for Senior Academic and Academic Related grades.

Environmental Principles

Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;

Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and

Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies

The OU as a Business – Policies, Strategies and Goals

The University defines sustainability as ‘meeting our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’. The OU acknowledges the impact of greenhouse gas emissions from our own operations, including the goods and services we procure, our travel and estate. As such, we have committed to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, through a programme of investment and measures to reduce and mitigate the adverse environmental impact of our activities.

We will level-up practice across the four nations, meeting the highest requirements, including from the Climate Change Act 2008, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and Ireland’s example of deliberative democracy using Citizens’ Assembly.

The OU Strategy (2022-2027) has five targets, one of which is sustainability, which demonstrates our commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development.

The new strategy formally launches in early 2022. The executive sponsor responsible for sustainability will appoint a coordination team in 2022 to advance reporting.

The OU sustainability vision – as laid out on the new [sustainability webpages](#) – is ‘to create and share knowledge and learning to realise social and environmental justice.’ We see our primary roles in sustainability as:

- An educator – placing sustainability at the heart of our teaching, research and knowledge exchange.
- A business – championing best practice across all four nations of the UK.

The current policies we hold related to environmental principles are being reviewed in line with the new strategy and increased funding to deliver on sustainable development. These are:

- [Sustainability Policy](#) – reducing and managing the environmental impact of our business
- [Biodiversity Policy](#) – protecting and cultivating biodiversity on the OU managed grounds
- [Heating Policy](#) – ensuring carbon reduction through control and management of heating in the OU buildings
- [Waste Recycling Policy](#) - reducing waste and increasing recycling and reuse across all areas of our estate and operations, including procurement.
- [Carbon Reduction Implementation Strategy](#) – In February 2021, the OU declared net zero by 2050 in line with UK Government policy. The Carbon Reduction Implementation Strategy

(CRIS) is going through governance processes and lays out a roadmap to net zero by 2030 for Scope 1 and 2 emissions and by 2050 for Scope 3 emissions. It also commits OU to completing divestment from fossil fuels by 2023.

- Travel Plan - setting targets for reduced single occupancy of cars, increased use of public transport and promotion of cycling and walking.

Implementation

The OU is currently developing an institutional sustainability delivery plan with KPIs for each department.

The OU as an educator - internal

Internally, our university-wide staff-led initiative Go Green aims to reduce our impact on the environment, both in work and at home. Activities include:

- A yammer network of over 500 colleagues with an interest in sustainability
- A *Climate Emergency Forum* as part of Sustainability Week 2019 – 200 staff in person and up to 300 online.
- Institution wide monthly newsletters and workshops on a variety of sustainability topics, free to all staff with c.400 attendees each year.
- Opening of the *Go Green Centre*, the OU's first physical space to house all things 'green' and to host various sustainability events.
- Food waste bins and crisp packet recycling points – available across the main Walton Hall Campus.
- Running the OU's first 'swap shop' event in Jan 2020 with over 300 items exchanged and given a new home

The OU as an educator – Research and Knowledge Exchange

The OU supports an extensive range of research activities that focus on social and environmental sustainability and feed directly into supporting the environmental principles. We recognise that sustainability is a global and interdisciplinary issue and undertake relevant research accordingly in each of our faculties across all four nations of the UK. Faculties and nations share the desire to understand the processes and systems that nourish and sustain the world around us. Our resources fall into three broad areas:

- The OU undertaking meaningful research with practical outcomes alongside excellent Blue Skies research;
- Knowledge Exchange that empowers our collaborators, better equipping them to engage with local to global environmental issues in their own contexts;
- Collaborative research projects that maximise our positive impact on the environment, economy, and society through engagement with external organisations ranging from public bodies to third sector businesses.

These resources are listed [on our sustainability website](#).

- The *School of Engineering and Innovation* has several groups undertaking ground-breaking research into new approaches to tackle environmental challenges.

- [Energy research](#) – focuses on low carbon energy futures and a diverse range of technical and policy innovations that have the potential to be helpful.
- The [Waste and Resource Management Group](#) – looks at *Bioaerosol Research*, addressing *Environmental Pollution*, and *Lifecycle Assessment*
- [Environmental Governance](#) – research that looks at the management of environmental and sustainability practices.
- The *School of Environment, Earth and Ecosystem Sciences* is grouped into four interlinked themes relating to environment:
 - [Astrobiology](#) – looking at the feasibility of habitable environments elsewhere in space and how the application of space technology can help respond to the global climate crisis
 - [Earth System Modelling](#) – applying a range of interdisciplinary modelling tools to the impacts of climate change on the earth system and human society.
 - [Palaeoenvironmental Change](#) – research to understand climate change from past changes in the Earth system from the geological record.
 - [Ecosystems](#) – investigating the ecology of organisms from microbes to plants and mammals, how they interact with each other, their environment and with people.

An example of ecosystem research is the [Floodplain Meadows Partnership](#). Floodplain meadows found alongside rivers in England and Wales play a vital role in absorbing floodwater and are highly biodiverse containing more than 40 different plant species per square metre, an essential source of nectar for pollinating insects, and they are also crucial to carbon storage. More than 97% of these habitats have disappeared in the past century. Since 2007, OU environmental scientists led by Professor David Gowing and funded by the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation have spearheaded this innovative collaboration with partners including Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, the Environment Agency and The National Trust to research, manage, promote and restore these unique meadows. In 2020, Ecover awarded a substantial grant to restore and protect 50 hectares of floodplain meadows along the banks of the River Thames in Oxfordshire.

In 2019 the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences launched an innovative Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project '[Picturing Climate: Participatory Photography and Narrative Storytelling for Climate Change Education](#)'. The project united artists, researchers and grassroots arts and culture organisations in Cuba, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan and the UK to explore the potential of arts and humanities-based methodologies for developing local and international climate education capacity. Led by Dr Agnes Czajka, the participants co-produced locally-relevant educational materials on climate-change-induced food and livelihood insecurities, and local solutions.

Professor Richard Blundel of The Open University Business School and colleagues have collaborated with The University of Oxford and business support organisations to create new tools and techniques to help SMEs grow greener. The interactive 5-hour free online course [Promoting sustainability in business: a values-based toolkit](#), is aimed at professional associations, business advisors and economic development organisations. To date, more than 1,000 people have used the toolkit in the UK and Pakistan. Feedback suggests it has helped individuals and organisations to engage SME clients on environmental issues, such as climate change mitigation.

The OU as an educator – Sustainability in Teaching

The OU offers a range of courses in environmental sustainability, delivered online and through supported distance learning. To complement our traditional undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications, we have launched a suite of short, skills-focused courses called Microcredentials. These 10-week, 100-hour courses available on the FutureLearn platform costing under £500 and enabling the learner to gain 10 credits (an undergraduate degree is 360 credits). New courses include: *Climate Change and the Polar Regions: Tools for the Climate Crisis*; *Tackling the Climate Crisis: Innovation from Cuba*; and *Transforming your Organisation for Sustainability*.

Our Environmental curriculum promotes a wide knowledge of environmental issues and solutions. For example, the [MSc in Environmental Management](#) examines current concerns of environmental protection, natural resource management and rapidly changing environmental legislation and policy, in local and global contexts, and helps students to develop the skills needed to unpack the issues and participate creatively in the process of improving environmental performance in all sectors of society. One module, *Managing for Sustainability*, aims to increase students understanding of delivering and supporting sustainability management within businesses.

You can find a list of all these [environmental courses here](#).

The OU as an educator – Mass Engagement and Partnerships

The OU's historic media partnership with the BBC promotes wide public understanding and action on environmental issues. This partnership means that OU research and staff expertise feeds into [Nature and Environment programmes](#) such as *Blue Planet II*, *Planet Earth*, *Earth from Space*, *Greta Thunberg: A Year to Change the World*, *Frozen Planet*, *Country File: Plant Britain* and *A Perfect Planet* allowing for mass engagement and knowledge exchange.

[Blue Planet II](#), was broadcast in more than 30 countries and watched by over 100m viewers. The OU's Professor Mark Brandon MBE, Dr Philip Sexton, Dr Miranda Dyson, Dr Pallavi Anand and Dr Carl Boardman steered the production, narrative and scientific content of the ground-breaking BBC TV documentary series, *Blue Planet II*, that has been seen by approximately 250 million people worldwide. The project catapulted ocean health and particularly into the public consciousness and changed behaviour inspiring the European Commission to ban single-use plastics (2018), the UK Government to legislate to ban microbeads (2018), increased charges for single-use plastic bags from five to 10 pence (2018) and banning single-use plastics, such as straws (2020).

The OU's International Development Office and STEM faculty worked on the UK Aid funded Transformation by Innovation in Distance Education [TIDE project](#). TIDE aimed to reform a national distance education system that involves nearly 40 universities and teaches 60% of higher education students in Myanmar. The project supported professional and institutional development of over 300 staff in those 40 universities, involving two other UK universities and an international NGO.

Measurement of Outcomes

Performance of business environmental objectives is monitored and reviewed through the environmental information and data provided annually to the [Higher Education Statistics Agency Estate Management Record](#). This data is also the basis for national sustainability benchmarking between universities. Some recent outcomes include:

- Carbon reduction of almost 54% (8251 tonnes) has been achieved since 2010 and a new net-zero target by 2030 is in place.
- 500+ Go Green Champions across all UK nations and locations champion sustainability.
- Regular strong attendance of monthly Go Green workshops and involvement in initiatives on carbon, waste and consumer reduction attract around 400 staff per year.

- 100% of the electricity supply is from fully renewable energy.
- 10-week trial of Meat Free Monday (pre-pandemic) and increased plant-based options in food outlets. All vegetarian options are now fully plant-based.
- We help the Woodland Trust and have planted over 3000 trees to date.
- 96% of waste diverted from landfill.
- 10 vehicle charging stations on the Walton Hall campus.
- Over 750 staff on the OU car share database, with dedicated parking bays across the main Walton Hall campus for those who travel via this method.
- Over 700 cycle parking spaces across OU sites. Active promotion of the Cycle to Work scheme, main campus hire bikes available.
- Regular cycle/walk/bus to work days across all sites to encourage more sustainable forms of transport for staff.
- There is no plastic cutlery in any OU catering outlet.

Anti-Corruption Principles

Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

The OU as a Business – Policies, Strategies and Goals

The OU operates a zero-tolerance approach to fraud, bribery and corruption, and fully implements all UK legislation including the 2010 Bribery Act. This approach is governed by several policies to which all staff must comply:

- [Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy](#)
- [Whistleblowing Policy](#)
- [Facilitation Payments Guidance](#)
- [Hospitality and Gifts Policy](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Policy](#)

The OU's Ethics Framework sets the tone for all University policies relating to organisational practices, including research ethics and codes of practice. It requires that the mission and values of the institution inform what we do and how we do it, and that we will always conduct our business with integrity and in a legal manner. University officers, employees, students, other members of the University and any other associated person acting on the University's behalf are responsible for acting honestly and with integrity by ensuring that their activities, interests and behaviours do not conflict with these values regardless of their seniority.

- [Ethics Framework](#)

The OU's financial regulations set out clear roles and responsibilities for financial governance, and establishes a clear code of conduct for staff

- [OU's financial regulations](#)

Implementation

The OU as an educator – Training and Knowledge Exchange

The OU provides its staff with e-learning on *Bribery and Corruption*. This gives an overview of anti-bribery legislation (The Bribery Act 2010) and explains how it affects both employees and organisations as a whole.

The [Open Justice Centre](#) works with the UN's Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to deliver the [Education for Justice \(E4J\)](#) initiative which aims to supply integrity and ethics education resources for schools, colleges and universities around the world. To support the initiative, the OU launched a certified five-hour online [train-the-trainer course](#) in November 2019. This was expanded in 2020 to cover anti-corruption education and has been translated into Spanish to reach a wider audience.

Hugh McFaul, Director of the Open Justice Centre has recently been awarded consultancy with the UN's Office on Drugs and Crime to advise on developing *Global Resources for Anti-Corruption Education*, an online community of practice to embed anti-corruption education in universities. This will bring the best of the OU's expertise to the anti-corruption agenda in making learning resources available at scale.

Measurement of outcomes

The *Education for Justice train-the-trainer* course attracts learners from over 100 countries, as diverse as the United States, India and Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Bhutan, Malawi, Myanmar and Fiji. One satisfied learner said “Teaching ethics in distance learning institutions is difficult as there is no direct face to face contact with students. The content and structure provide an opportunity to teach ethics in a more complete manner”.

We look forward to continually improving on how we meet the ten principles of the Global Compact, involving more of our colleagues across the OU in this important process and learning from other organisations so that we can respond meaningfully and effectively to the global climate and ecological crises.

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