Letter COMMUNICATION ON ENGAGEMENT (CoE)

Period covered by this Communication on Engagement:

30 November 2021 to 30 November 2023

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

30.11.23

To our stakeholders:

At this critical time in human history, 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 2023 Communication on Engagement with the United Nations Global Compact. We welcome feedback on its contents and remain true to our mission; "to be open to people, places, methods, and ideas".

In this Communication on Engagement, we describe the actions that our organisation has taken over the last two years, to support the UN Global Compact and its Principles. 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 and the UN Global Compact

The OU joined the UN Global Compact in November 2018 as part of our ongoing commitment to sustainability. This second Communication on Engagement 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 introduces the OU and our mission; outlines the importance of the ten principles to our work; and reports against the ten principles in four sections: Human Rights, Labour, Environment, and Anti-Corruption.

The Open University

The Open University (OU) promotes social justice by making learning accessible to all, regardless of circumstance. Founded as a disruptive innovation in 1969 with the aim 'to reach more students with life changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society', we have expanded our social justice mission to encompass environmental justice. We continue our mission of being 'Open to People, Places, Methods and Ideas'. 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 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 has seen more than 100 million visitors since its launch 17 years ago and over 2 million courses completed.

- **Responsive:** The OU is responsive to the needs of students, employers, communities, and society. This is reflected in our formal qualifications, our free learning, and our long-standing partnership with the BBC, bringing co-productions into the lives of millions around the globe. The University's 2022-2027 Strategy 'Learn and Live' encompasses five goals: greater reach, success for our students, societal impact, equality, and sustainability.

The Open University and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Our engagement with the *UN Global Compact* and the *Ten Principles i*s a key part of demonstrating our commitment and actions towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Our sustainability vision is to "create and share knowledge and learning to realise social and environmental justice". See our sustainability webpages . 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.

Our commitment to environmental and social sustainability runs through our education (how and what we teach), our research, our enterprise, and our public engagement work. Our global presence and profile give us a unique opportunity to drive thought leadership and mass public engagement for achieving sustainability.

- 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.
- An early pioneer in the use of **modern learning technologies**, the OU has always taken full advantage of the internet. The University pivoted to online working quickly during the pandemic and has supported other organisations (see Hybrid working and digital transformation toolkit) with our long-standing expertise. Inspired by the Well-being of Future Generations Act Wales (2015), these resources also consider the carbon impact of digital through starting to embed this invisible impact in our decisions on digital design and delivery.
- Responsible Futures is a partnership between the Students' Association and The OU and is a structured approach to **embedding sustainability** in the curriculum and across all aspects of student learning. The accreditation mark is coordinated by SOS-UK (Students Organising for Sustainability) and is awarded through a student-led audit. There are 50 criteria comprising 9 mandatory and 41 optional criteria, arranged across five themes including: benchmarking; leadership and strategy; policy and commitment; interventions; and outreach. The OU began working on Responsible Futures in 2021 and will be audited in April 2024.
- The OU is uniquely positioned to undertake **research** projects that directly relate to the SDGs through the 'Open Societal Challenges' research platform. Designed for collaboration on some of the most important challenges of our time, the platform enables those outside the OU to work with our researchers on society's most pressing issues – all of which fall under the broad definition of sustainability. Some of the projects aim to combat the climate crisis while protecting people's rights and improving living conditions now and in the future; others propose new models for living well, and many overlap across themes as they aim to redress inequalities across the world to bring about religious tolerance, gender safety and equality, and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The platform already hosts almost 100 OSC projects spanning these themes, which are searchable by SDG.

- Our work on **enterprise** is led by our Business Development Unit which supports organisations from all sectors to develop their people. A [2023 report published by the OU about environmental, social and governance (ESG)](#) identifies that ESG is discussed in board rooms and that urgent upskilling and reskilling of employees would enable action.

  - 77% of the 500 business respondents agree that ESG (environmental, social and governance) factors impact their organisation's brand or reputation, yet only 8% have a fully realised ESG strategy.

  - Businesses are held back from implementing ESG due to lack of financial resources (28%), missing essential skills (24%) and its' complexity (23%).

  - Over 80% of businesses have skills gaps in each of the three ESG pillars.

  - The OU's microcredentials offer a route for upskilling and reskilling professionals in ESG, CSR and other sustainability-related roles. [Climate Change: Transforming your Organisation for Sustainability](#) both challenges and supports learners to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to reimagine their organisation and lead for sustainability.

- Through our unique [public education partnership with the BBC](#) we co-produce important primetime programmes such as: [Wild Isles](#), a series that celebrates the wonders of British wildlife. [Earth](#), a landmark series following Chris Packham, as he revisits Earth's most epic moments to tell the incredible story of our home planet. The supporting online content also includes an [interactive interview exploring Earth's history](#). The series ['What They Really Mean For You'.](#) delves into some of the key challenges facing society's quest for better travel and heating in the context of meeting Net Zero. Part of the supporting online content is an interactive quiz by The OU ['Are you a NetZero Hero?'](#) allowing us all to learn how we can contribute to climate safety.

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.

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 Global Compact's ten principles. Further examples of our work are below:

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 Open University 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 *Responsible 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](#)). It aims to place social, economic, 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.

- [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)

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 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). *Introduction to Safeguarding* (launched 2021) is relevant to anyone working in the sector to ensure complete organisational adoption of safeguarding practice. *Implementing Safeguarding in the Aid Sector* supports learners to deal with

challenging situations relevant to the specific aid sub-sectors they are working in, such as education, health, and humanitarian. *Safeguarding Leadership in Action* explores the relationship between leadership and safeguarding (launched June 2022).

- In partnership with FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), 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.

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.

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

- A consortium of African universities, UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), and the Global Campaign for Peace Education are collaborating on a £1.9m AHRC-funded <u>'Peace-building and education: decolonising peace education in Africa'</u> project. This project, commenced in April 2020 and running to 2024, 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 <u>Project for Interdisciplinary Law and Religion Studies (PILARS)</u> is an international academic team 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 <u>three educational videos</u> exploring the human right to Religious Freedom, Freedom of Expression, and to Privacy.

<u>Article 19 - Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression:</u>

- Since launch in 2018, the 8-week online course <u>'Make Change Happen'</u> has supported over 17,000 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 was developed by the OU's International Development Office and the international NGO Oxfam.

<u>Article 26 - Everyone has the right to education</u>

- <u>Skills for Prosperity (S4P) Kenya (2020-2023)</u> a UK Government FCDO-funded programme helps increase capacity for inclusive economic growth in Kenya by improving employability, employment opportunities and the earning potential of beneficiaries. The programme consortium included the OU, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and was led by Leonard Cheshire. Free online courses developed for the programme can be <u>accessed here</u>.

- 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 <u>introductory modules</u> 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.

Measurement of Outcomes

- We are the largest provider of higher education for people with disabilities - 37,078 students declaring a disability studied with us in 2021/22.

- 33% of students had one A level or a lower qualification at entry.

- 25% of OU UK undergraduates live in the 25% most deprived areas.

- 17,672 enrolled on the OU's [Make Change Happen](#) course on FutureLearn.

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 provide information on

compliance with fraud, money laundering, child labour, modern slavery, environmental and labour law obligations.

Our equality statement sets out our vision and key principles for equality. The OU Equality Scheme 2022-2026 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.

Implementation

A self-managed staff network and staff-organised groups support equality, diversity, and inclusion for OU staff, ensuring continuous support for the right to collective bargaining and the elimination of discrimination. These groups include:

- The EDI Committee - a committee of Senate that considers all matters relating to EDI, making recommendations to Senate, and advising Council in relation to Professional Services staff. It promotes, steers, and actively progresses equality of experience, increases diversity and fosters inclusive practices for all at the Open University.

- The Care and Caring Network - a self-managed 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 requests for reasonable adjustments from disabled students.

- Black Minority Ethnic (BME) staff network - providing networking opportunities for all BME staff and promoting peer support, confidence building and most of all greater inclusivity.

- Enabling Staff 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 open to all EU nationals, non-UK nationals and UK nationals.

- Proud Network (LGBT+) - responding to social needs and giving voice to staff, enabling issues of concern or interest to be shared, raised, and addressed.

- Women 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.

All OU staff undertake mandatory training on the following topics:

- 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. 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 Open University as an Educator

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.

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace is a free 8 week course, giving learners an introduction to the benefits and complexities of developing and supporting a diverse and inclusive workforce, including the positive impact of diversity on staff wellbeing.

Measurement of Outcomes

The OU is committed to transparent reporting of progress and outcomes against protected characteristics and uses the following frameworks:

- The Athena SWAN Charter is a global award that promotes gender equality in Higher Education. The OU first attained an institutional bronze award from *Athena SWAN* in 2013 and renewed this in 2016 and again in 2021. The OU is aiming for an Institutional Silver award in 2026.

Of the OU's departments (Schools), the *Physical Sciences, Engineering and Innovation, Computing and Communications, Maths and Stats and Knowledge Media Institute* schools hold silver awards. *Life, Health and Chemical Sciences, Environment, Earth and Ecosystem Sciences, The Business School and Education, Childhood, Youth & Sport* schools hold bronze awards. The OU is committed to ensuring that all Schools hold at least a bronze award by 2024.

Over the last 2 years the University has increased from 6 to 9 departmental awards (5 of which are silver), supported 4 schools, who are currently preparing their first submissions and we are preparing to make our first non-academic submission with CIO (Digital Services).

- 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, and is progressing to Level 2 status.

- 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 process run by *Advance HE* and is progressing its application for a Bronze Award. The Race Equality Charter is a framework to improve the representation, experience, progression and success of racially minoritised staff and students in higher education. The OU plans to submit for a Bronze Award in 2024/25 to recognise work to improve racial equality at the university. In 2022 a REC EDI Project Officer and Project Lead were employed to take this work forward. They have developed 5 supporting working groups covering Anti-racism & Communications; Teaching & Learning; Student Pipeline; Research Staff; and Professional Services Staff. They have also expanded membership to include more key stakeholders from across the institution.

- The OU is committed to reporting on its Gender Pay Gap and taking action to reduce it. From 2021, The Open University also committed to publishing its ethnicity pay gap. This is part of a wider plan for embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within the institution and affording greater transparency.

In 2022, the median gender pay gap was 1.6% and the mean gender pay gap was 4.1%. The OU median ethnicity pay gap was 6.5% and the mean ethnicity pay gap was 7.8%. Though we have seen an improvement in both our gender and ethnicity pay gaps, we believe these gaps should not exist at all. We remain committed to

addressing our pay gaps through long-term, meaningful actions that work towards improving the representation of women in senior roles while increasing the proportion of Black Minority Ethnic colleagues. More information is available in our [Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Report 2022](#).

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 sustainable estates policies have been updated in 2023 to align with the new strategy, these include:

- Net Zero Carbon Policy and Net Zero Carbon Plan 2030 - sets an ambitious goal of achieving Net Zero emissions from energy use (scope 1 and 2) by 2030 and from all indirect emissions no later than 2050.

- Environmental Sustainability Policy – developing a sustainable estate by reducing the negative environmental impacts of our activities and enhancing the positive.

- Sustainable Construction Policy - embedding Sustainability and Net Zero principles in our design, construction, maintenance, and operation activities.

- Waste & Resource Policy and Plan – our aim to maintain zero waste to landfill and increase recycling rates to 90% and eliminate avoidable single use plastic.

- Heating & Cooling Policy – provision of comfortable working environments with

energy efficiency through optimised controls and seasonal scheduling.

- Sustainable Food Policy – providing healthy, high quality, sustainable food options.

- Water Policy - minimising water usage, sustainable water management practices and water harvesting systems in buildings and landscapes.

- Biodiversity Policy - conserving and maintaining our green spaces to promote biodiversity and habitat improvements.

Implementation

The OU's approach is that sustainability is 'everyone's job'. A small team of two coordinate activity which includes:

- Sustainability Planning Action and Reporting Kit- SPARK- was developed in 2022 to support impactful and effective delivery of our sustainability ambitions across the whole University. SPARK supports the whole organisation to integrate sustainability actions, ensuring we reduce our negative environmental impacts and increase our positive activities.
Developed collaboratively with colleagues across all areas, SPARK enables teams to create a tailored sustainability action plan, provides resources to engage all staff in its delivery and is a place to gather evidence of actions as they happen. It integrates engagement data to inform a wide range of internal and external sustainability monitoring and reporting across the four nation sites of the OU.

- Governance and engagement. Representatives from all areas of the OU sit on a Sustainability Coordination Group which meets monthly and feeds into a Sustainability Steering Group made up of members of the Executive. Quarterly updates to the Executive on key issues inform annual reporting to the Board (the OU Council). A monthly all staff Sustainability bulletin updates and invites participation. Monthly Go Green workshops and ongoing events activity with staff and students, in person and online ensure communications and involvement of all stakeholders. Activities include:

- Carbon Literacy Training. Fully funded for all OU staff and students, we offer an 8-hour accredited course with action pledges and a LinkedIn Sustainability community. We also give loan access to the 'How Bad are Bananas' game, based on the book of the same name by Mike Berners-Lee. The game is designed to start conversations around climate impacts with any audience internally or externally.

- Hosting public online events. For instance ,we sponsor UK National Awareness Weeks, such as Net Zero Week and Green Infrastructure Week, hearing from our academic community and open to the public.

- An online reuse portal. Available for internal and external reuse of unwanted items ranging from stationery to furniture to specialist lab equipment. Warp-It supports the reuse and redistribution of surplus assets within the University, reducing carbon emissions and waste, and achieving financial savings by offering items for free.

- Expert working groups. On key issues ranging from: work from home emissions; climate risk and adaptation planning.

- Student-led curriculum mapping of sustainability content in over 450 module descriptors and review of professional statutory and regulatory body accreditation processes.

The Open University as an Educator

The OU offers a range of traditional undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in environmental sustainability, delivered online and through supported distance learning.

- 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.

- 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 newsletter for staff.

Research

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.

The Open Societal Challenges Platform has been designed for collaboration on research that all sits under the broad definition of sustainability: Sustainability, Living Well and Tackling Inequalities. Some examples of projects that promote greater environmental responsibility and encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies on the platform include:

- Weston Open Living Lab for nature recovery and human-nature connection – With over 80% of the UK and half of the world's population living in urban areas, the sustainability of cities is a critical challenge. This project focuses on the importance of green infrastructure in developing climate-smart cities. By establishing the Weston Open Living Lab, the project aims to investigate urban ecosystems' societal and natural value, improve human-nature connection, and develop research programs that can inform public support for nature recovery.

- Catalysing transformative food futures for global sustainability (CATAPULT) – CATAPULT is a Challenge that aims to explore innovative approaches to food production, processing, distribution, and consumption that can help to reduce the environmental impact of the food system. Focusing on issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and food waste, the project aims to develop practical solutions that can be implemented at scale to promote more sustainable food systems.

- Art and Ecology Challenge – this challenge aims to change public understanding of today's ecological crisis through the art and visual cultures of the past. The project reconnects art and science, moving towards curiosity and active engagement as part of a more meaningful and sustainable solution.

- Surface Water Integrated Monitoring (SWIM) – This Challenge aims to create community-owned and low-cost environmental monitoring solutions, particularly in the Amazon, where Indigenous communities are stewards of biodiverse areas. The project will build on previous research to monitor surface water using a wetland monitoring system using ground data, satellite remote sensing, and drone surveillance, with a prototype USWV called 'FLOAT' tested in situ by Indigenous researchers.

- SPLICE: Sustainable Processes Linked for an Integrated Circular Economy – SPLICE

looks to combat environmental contamination and economic losses due to unsustainable waste management by providing full-system solutions to recover, recycle, and generate valuable materials and energy from wastes. The project aims to accelerate societal change towards reimagining wastes as sources of energy and valuable resources.

Wider OU research includes:

- 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.

- Floodplain Meadows Partnership. More than 97% of these habitats have disappeared in the past century yet 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.

CASE STUDY

An example of research which promotes greater environmental responsibility (Principle 8) is the ongoing programme of research into urban greening for heat-resilient neighbourhoods. This programme of work is undertaken in collaboration with researchers in the Faculty of WELS, colleagues from National Taiwan University, and involves participatory workshops and interviews with residents in two cities (Glasgow, Scotland, UK; and Taipei, Taiwan) to understand how residents experience extreme hot weather, and how they see the role of trees, parks, and green spaces in reducing the risk they face from heat.

These projects have a strongly applied focus, and place emphasis on involving citizens themselves as well as local-level stakeholders in setting the research questions, as well as on creating an evidence base that communities can use to develop their own heat response action plans and community-led greenspace initiatives. To this end, non-academic institutions such as Climate Ready Clyde – who are responsible for planning climate change adaptation action in the Glasgow City Region – are involved in the project as full partners. This research is funded by the British Academy; and a pilot phase was previously supported by the Economic and Social Research Council in partnership with Taiwan's National Science and Technology Council.

Mass Engagement and Partnerships

The [OU's historic media partnership with the BBC](#) promotes wide public understanding and motivates action on environmental issues. This partnership means that OU research and staff expertise feeds into [Nature](#) [and Environment programmes](#) including the Blue Planet, Frozen Planet and Planet Earth series. Supporting online content includes extra interviews and learning activities, posters and behind the scenes extras. One example is BBC Bitesize aimed at children, teenagers, and young people. The BBC Bitesize Regenerators campaign focused on green careers advice from early career.

Measurement of Outcomes

OU **research** is designed to have impact, influence policy and practice, and change lives for the better. The most recent UK Research Excellence Framework (2021) recognised that 82% of the OU's research was assessed as world-leading or internationally excellent. In July 2023, the OU held an OU Research & Societal Impact Showcase 2023 in July to celebrate the first anniversary of Open Societal Challenges (OSC) and the work of our Postgraduate Research Students (PGR).

The Responsible Futures student-led accreditation of sustainability in the formal, informal and subliminal **curriculum** will take place in April 2024.

In 2023, **operational policies** set a new baseline year of 2020/21 - anticipated to be our new post-covid business as usual profile with the adoption of hybrid working. Headline achievements since the new baseline year and last Global Compact report include:

Carbon Reduction

- Scope 1 & 2 carbon reduction of almost 66% (10,109T COO2e) has been achieved since 2010.
- In 2021/22 we reported a slight reduction of 3% to 5,500T COO2e, compared to the previous year (also new baseline year), attributed to improved space utilisation and mothballing unused spaces, and introduction of winter heating 1 degree turn down initiative and building optimisation projects.
- Scope 3 emissions from procurement of goods and services is just under 100,000T CO2e.

Waste and Recycling

- The OU maintains zero waste to landfill. All waste is either reused, recycled, composted, or sent to energy recovery. In 2021/22 87% of waste was recycled.

Sustainable Travel

- Total of 33 electrical vehicle charging stations have been installed across the estate. 23 new stations were installed since 2020.

Sustainable Food / sustainable catering contract

- Food for Life certification – Bronze Award.
- Sustainable sourcing of food - MSC and Red Tractor certified.
- Sustainable plant-based dishes are promoted by featuring them first on the menus and a dedicated vegan hot food counter.

Sustainability Staff Engagement, Upskilling and Reskilling

- 380+ Go Green Champions and 650+ members of Viva Engage Group.
- 300 members of the Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC).
- 163 Staff members using Giki Zero (personal carbon footprinting).
- Monthly Go Green events for staff, recordings of events on our website with c.400 workshop attendees each year.
- 700 staff and students completed our free 8-hour Carbon Literacy training, with half becoming Carbon Literacy Project certified.
- 35 staff have played over 20 'How Bad are Bananas?' carbon literacy games engaging approximately 500 students, staff, and local partners in carbon conversations.
- Trained 20 of our careers service staff on climate and green careers to ensure our students receive advice and support on jobs in sustainability and net zero.

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 provides 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.

Continual improvement
We are 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. We can be contacted on: sustainabilty@open.ac.uk

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