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1	Nov 2011	Office of Procurement and Sustainability	First publication
2	Nov 2013	Procurement and Sustainability	Updated figures and plan
3	July 2022	Environment Officer (Engagement and Projects)	Major refresh throughout to align with existing Sustainability Policies
4	April 2025 October 2026	Environment Manager	Review throughout and inclusion of Plan for Plastics content and goals Review throughout data/graphs and pie charts updated

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Introduction

The University has a long-standing commitment to sustainable waste management, recycling and protection of the environment.

This Plan provides information on the strategy for managing recycling and waste recycling at the University, reviews performance and highlights diversity of the University's waste streams and how they are managed. The plan identifies possible improvements and incentives and makes recommendations on further reductions and how these can contribute to our targets through the Action Plan.

Any material that we discard or no longer want, may be a waste stream, with other definitions of waste available. Whether the material has a value or can be sold, does not impact on the fact if a material is waste. Our first priority as a University should be to reduce our waste and support a more circular system following the waste hierarchy to reduce, reuse then recycle before disposal is considered.

Waste is classified into two main categories, hazardous and non-hazardous waste. Both hazardous and non-hazardous waste streams have some materials that can and cannot be recycled, and after prevention of waste generation it should be the aim of the University to recycle as much as possible.

Our focus on plastics

The University is delivering world-leading research into plastics and the many and varied threats they pose, in particular within the marine environment. Through its Marine Institute and International Marine Litter Research Unit (both led by Professor Richard Thompson OBE), its mission in this area is to advocate a holistic approach, not only furthering our understanding of the impacts of litter on the environment and society, but to identify the solutions and the pathways necessary to achieve them.

This expertise – which dates from a paper in Science in 2004, when Professor Thompson was the first scientist to use the term 'microplastics' to describe microscopic fragments of marine debris – has been used to inform government policy in the UK and beyond and its academics have been invited to produce evidence for numerous public inquiries and organisations including the United Nations and the Government Office for Science.

In 2018 the city of Plymouth announced their Plan for Plastics and a city-wide Plastics Task Force to drive a significant use of plastics in the city, to which the University were a key partner to take a lead role in both scientific and social terms and held a standalone Plan for Plastics. From 2025, the Waste Policy and Action Plan integrates information and actions from our Plan for Plastics that was first issued in 2018. This included relevant requirements from the WRAP UK Plastics Pact. The overall aim of the pact is to transform the UK plastic packaging sector and help stop plastics polluting the environment.

WRAP UK Plastics Pact evolved:

- To continue to address market failures in plastics circularity. The introduction of policy alone will not fix the problem.
- As whilst the UN Global Plastics Treaty will set the global course, it is widely accepted that public/private partnerships like the Plastics Pact model will play a major part in delivery of the Treaty mandate by complementing and accelerating impact.
- To pave the way for future legislation in ways that can be replicated and scaled internationally.
- To provide greater transparency and the ability to influence the UK's packaging footprint;
- To mitigate unintended consequences caused by material switching; and
- To enable more holistic decision making.

Strategy

The University aims to reduce its Scope 3 Carbon Footprint associated with waste generation, as well as to reduce costs associated with waste management, and to maximise rebates for recycling.

Working with staff across the University, we aim to support the transition to a circular economy, focusing on minimising waste generation. To support this the University community needs to ensure it minimises waste generation where possible, and to dispose of waste correctly to ensure we maximise recycling.

For more information on how to comply with University processes for disposing of waste in order to comply with Duty of Care obligations please view our Waste Code of Practice (CoP) and the Sustainability SharePoint site waste pages. Our CoP outlines the legal obligations for waste disposal and how we meet them. This code of practice includes both reference to both non-hazardous and hazardous wastes.

Our waste obligations mean that we must adhere to the waste hierarchy. Therefore, where possible, we minimise disposable items, working alongside our Procurement Department. This prevents waste being generated in the first instance. We shall prioritise reuse, recycling and energy recovery of materials to reduce our impact on the environment and only use landfill as a last resort, for example for asbestos waste where there is no alternative option.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this Waste Plan is to contribute towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically:

- Zero Hunger (2)
- Sustainable Cities and Communities (11)
- Responsible Consumption and Production (12)
- Climate Action (13)
- Life Below Water (14)
- Life On Land (15)

The Action Plan follows these objectives:

1. Reduce the amount of waste generated, measured per student to 20kg or less consistently by 2028.
2. Increase uptake of recycling and reuse such that recycled and reuse waste per student is more than 11kg or less by 2028

3. Minimum of one significant waste campaign by 2028
4. Take actions to eliminate problematic or unnecessary single-use packaging items through redesign, innovation or alternative (reuse) delivery models
5. 100% of plastic packaging sold within cafes on campus to be reusable, recyclable or compostable
6. Capture reuse figures for annual reporting annually up to 2028

Links to other policies

The action plan directly supports the University's 'Strategy 2030: a future of excellence', particularly in addressing the ambition to achieve resilience, sustainability and effectiveness. Other relevant plans and strategies for sustainability include:

- Biodiversity Plan
- Carbon Management Plan and Strategy
- Environmental Policy
- Estate and Facilities Campus Strategies
- ISO 14001:2026
- Plymouth City Council (PCC) Plan for Plastic
- Responsible Procurement Policy and Action Plan
- Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) Plastic Free Coastlines (led by PCC)
- The WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) UK Plastics Pact
- Waste Code of Practice

Governance

The University Executive Group has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Waste and Action Plan. Delegated responsibility for achieving this plan is with the Procurement and Waste Working Group reporting to the Sustainability Advisory Group (SAG). This group brings together representatives from across the University including professional services, research and teaching and learning. SAG subsequently reports to UEG and the Board of Governors.



We receive monthly waste weight data for reporting and monitoring from our waste contractors, which we can use to measure our performance of the Waste Management Action Plan against the KPIs. Waste and recycling performance reporting is included in the annual sustainability reports and also used for the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) annual Estate Management Records (EMR).

Responsibilities

Staff and Students

Engage and support delivery of the plan, and to:

- Consider the packaging and end of life of products prior to purchase and prioritise those that can re-enter the circular economy by being re-used or recycled.
- Separate waste items, including removing paper from folders and plastic sleeves.
- Empty liquid from any containers before putting bottles/cups etc. in the bins.
- Fold down cardboard and put in, or near recycling bins.
- Do not over fill bags to prevent manual handling injury and/or spillage.
- Securely tie bags ahead of collection.
- Ensure confidential waste materials are stored securely until collected.
- Deposit glass bottles and jars directly in the bottle bank located outside the Scott Recycling and Waste Yard.

Sustainability Advisory Group
Agree the waste management plan and review actions within annually provided by the Procurement and Waste working Group. Report progress into the University Executive Group.

Head of Sustainability
Lead on delivering actions within the waste management plan not related to grounds maintenance in collaboration with Associate Director – Campus Services.

Associate Director – Campus Services
Management of waste and recycling collection and contracts across the University. Ensuring the waste contractor adheres to the waste service delivery plan.

Head of Procurement
Supports the facilitation of waste reduction from purchasing at the University.

Sustainable Procurement & Waste Working Group
Report into SAG with actions and improvements. The chair provides an annual update of actions to SAG.

Facilities Managers

Responsible for managing the performance of the Waste Contractor and capturing this through Key Performance Indicators, to be shared at each sustainable Procurement & Waste Working Group

Estates Trade and Project Teams
To ensure that contractors and workers on site are dealing with waste appropriately and are taking steps to minimise waste generated.

Sustainable Earth Institute
Help promote and engage in research and education benefiting this plan.

Waste Contractor
Assist with engagement materials, searching for new recycling opportunities, and attend events to promote recycling and waste reduction as specified in the waste service delivery plan.

Other Contractors
All contractors are required to comply with our Waste Code of Practice. This includes ensuring all waste is stored securely in suitable containers prior to disposal, and that waste transfer notes are supplied for all waste removed from site.

Scope

This plan covers the waste generated through the University's recycling and waste management contract which applies to the following sites: Main Campus, Cookworthy, Marine Station, , ICP and John Bull / Derriford Research Facility. However, it is encouraged to be applied to all sites, outside of this management boundary and through outsourced services.

The requirements of waste and materials as outlined in this policy will be extended to outsourced suppliers and the supply chain through individual contracts with those suppliers.

Performance to date

In phase 1 we committed to the following:

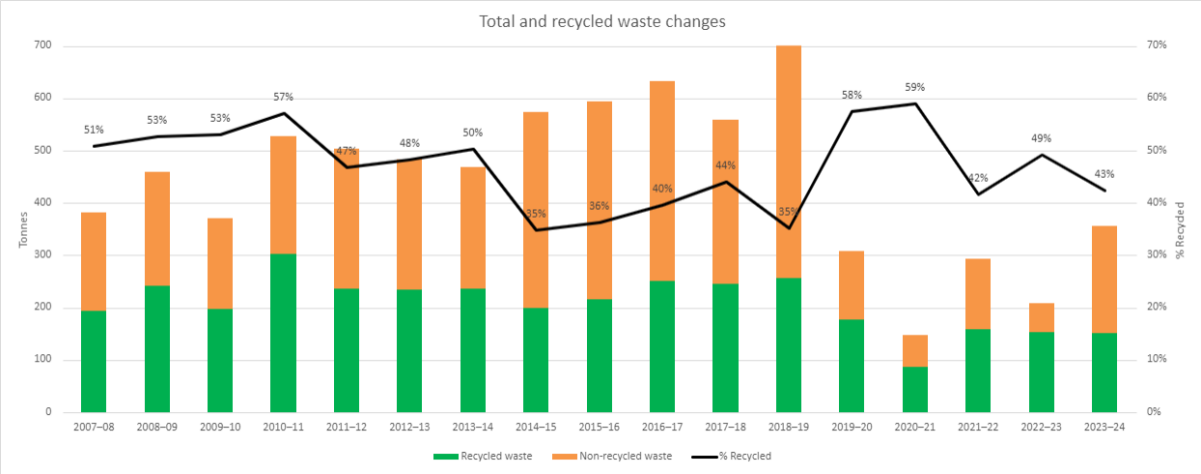
- All takeaway containers from UCSP outlets to be biodegradable
- Removal of plastic straws from all UCSP and UPSU outlets
- Glass bottles used for hospitality.

We receive our waste weight data for reporting and monitoring from our waste contractors. We have regular collections of three main different waste streams from our sites, and collate this data monthly: general waste, mixed recycling, and food waste. Other types of waste, such as mixed glass and WEEE are not collected as frequently, and we collate these items to give us annual weight totals. Some of the specialist waste, like clinical hazardous and sharps for example, are collected by a third party organised by our primary contractors, and we likewise receive the weight data through in our regular reports.

Annual waste and recycling performance

The graph below represents the total waste figures and percentage of recycled waste since 2007 – 08 academic year. In 2017, a new waste and recycling contract was put in place. Since then, we have seen the introduction of a new reporting and monitoring system for waste, and new recycling signs for our bins. Additional sites have also been incorporated into the contract resulting in more waste being managed and monitored centrally.

The impact of Covid-19 can be clearly seen with a significant reduction in the amount of waste generated, due to the impact of reduced numbers of staff and students physically onsite. Waste generation increased as campus population returned, however, changes in behaviour alongside increased communications on waste will hopefully see a continual improvement in waste generation and recycling. Plans for engagement with staff and students to proactively reduce waste production are given in the action plan.



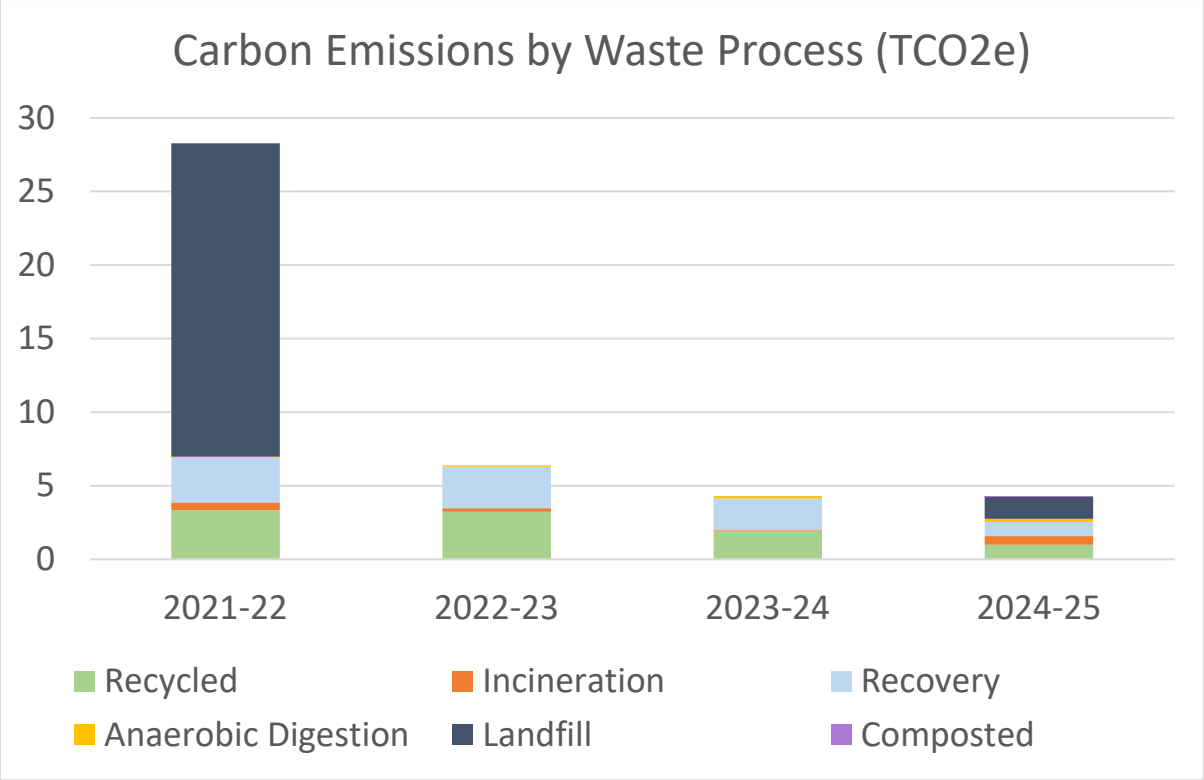
Tonnage data for specific waste streams are detailed below from 2018-2025, with the percentages showing the change on the previous year. The annual change in waste per student number is also given in next table. The anaerobic digestion waste stream consists solely of food waste produced from University outlets, which was introduced as a separate stream in 2016-17. The waste produced per student dropped below our target of 20kg per student in the years 2019-20 and 2020-21, but this is as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic disrupting campus activity and has risen in recent years as e full campus activity has resumed.

Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Total Waste (tonnes)	698	301	137	381	311	357	417
Total Waste Change from Previous Year	25%	-57%	-54%	158%	-18%	15%	17%
Waste per Student (kg)	40.8	18.6	7.2	23.6	18.4	21.2	26.4
Recycled Waste (tonnes)	252	175	82	159	153	152	192
Percentage of Total Waste Recycled	36%	58%	60%	55%	51%	48%	48%
Energy from Waste (tonnes)	430	106	22	164	127	183	181
Anaerobic Digestion (tonnes)	14	4	0.2	9	9	16	25

Incinerator(tonnes)	15	9	5	25	11	2	10
Landfill (tonnes)	0	11	28	46	0	0	3

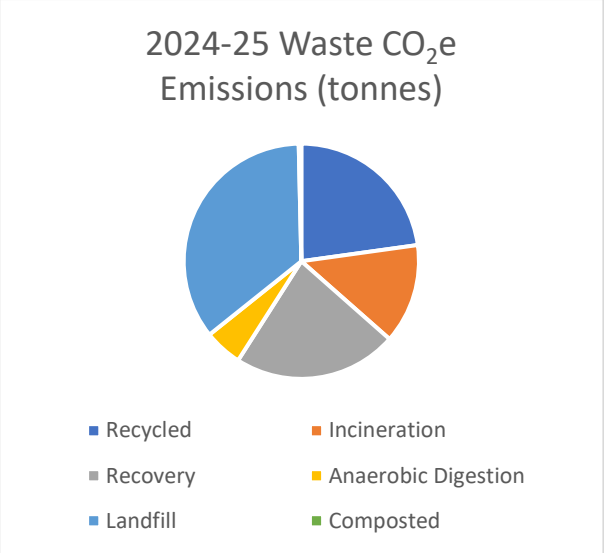
Waste and Recycling carbon performance

The graphs below show our performance in carbon equivalent emissions from the University's waste. It can be clearly seen that by removing most of the waste going to landfill from changing our management contracts in 2017-18 we have had a substantial reduction in waste CO_2e emissions equating to -89.6% from the previous year.



The two pie charts expand the data for the year 2024-2025. The charts highlight that there are currently negligible differences in the carbon estimations between our recycling and general waste routes. However, we have made large improvements in the emissions of general waste by avoiding landfill as much as currently possible. Despite our reporting of carbon emissions from waste routes showing little difference between recycling and energy recovery, materials produced from recycling are considered to have a lower embodied carbon footprint. There are numerous other environmental benefits to recycling, that we currently do not measure, such as avoidance of the particulate emissions from energy recovery of general waste.





Bin Surveys

Bin surveys are conducted at chosen, irregular times to assess the effectiveness of certain waste streams. Two surveys were conducted in April and May 2022 on the SU roof external bins to assess contamination of recycling in this area. The contamination here was high, such that only 1/7 recycling bags were appropriate to send to recycling from the April survey, and 0/7 from the May survey. The April survey was conducted as a visual assessment, whereas the May survey was undertaken by utilising weights of each material category. These surveys will be used to inform actions on waste reduction, by identifying target materials. The full results may be found on the Sustainability SharePoint site waste pages.

SU Roof General Waste Bins	April Visual	May Weight	SU Roof Recycling Waste Bins	April Visual	May Weight
Hard Plastic (e.g bottles)	5%	10%	Hard Plastic (e.g bottles)	15%	18%
Food packaging	40%	10%	Food packaging	23%	28%
paper & card	28%	5%	paper & card	21%	12%
Glass	0%	10%	Glass	1%	0%
Paper cups	5%	7%	Paper cups	15%	15%
Cans	4%	2%	Cans	20%	17%
Food Waste	3%	21%	Food Waste	3%	10%
Other non-rec	15%	34%	Other non-rec	2%	0%

General	April	May	Recycling	April	May
non-rec	80%	73%	non-rec	43%	53%
Mixed Recycling	20%	17%	Mixed Recycling	56%	47%
other rec	0%	10%	other rec	1%	0%

Other Achievements

Action	Year Completed
Water points identified on a map accessible via the PlymUni app	2025
Waste Campaign, facilitated by the Staff Sustainability Network	2024
Bin survey with students from School of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics	2024
Investigation into suppliers to avoid polystyrene for scientific cold deliveries	2023
Bin mural design competition for UPSU bin signage	2022
Bin survey with students alongside UPSU	2022
Began trial of Warp It resource re-use system	2021
Develop a sustainability eLearning module with information on waste and links to further resources	2021
Introduce coffee cup recycling on campus	2021
Launch of the Ditch the Disposables campaign including discount for customers using a reusable cup	2018
Joining of major nationwide initiatives, including the WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) and the UK Plastics Pact	2018
Signing of the Phase 1 Plastic Free Plymouth pledge and joining the Ocean City Plastics Task Force, which included removing at least three items of plastic: o All takeaway containers from UCSP outlets to be biodegradable o Removal of plastic straws from all UCSP and UPSU outlets o Glass bottles used for hospitality	2018
Publication of our first Plan for Plastics (now embedded into this policy)	2018
Create new recycling and waste signage to inform University Staff and Students of what goes where	2018
Simplify recycling on campus by having Dry Mixed Recycling, rather than requiring greater separation	2017
Require zero waste going to landfill within the contract specification to send all general waste to the MVV energy from waste site in Devonport.	2017

Waste Action Plan

Goals

1. Minimise consumption of single-use plastics (linked to our target to reduce the amount of waste generated to 20kg per student per annum)

2. Recycle all plastic waste (linked to our target to increase recycling and re-use such that non-recyclable waste per student is reduced to 6kg or less by 2027, equivalent to 70% recycled of our total waste reduction target) and ensure correct management of waste

3. Support the economy and our supply chain to move towards the removal of single-use plastics and implementation of alternatives

4. Deliver world leading research to provide robust evidence about the environmental problems associated with plastic, thereby helping society tackle the global challenge of moving towards a plastic free society

5. Raise awareness within the University as well as externally about the issues associated with single-use plastics and waste generation and promote behaviour change

Objective	Action	Measurement	SDG	Responsibility	Date
Reduce the amount of waste generated to 20kg per student or less by 2027	Host upcycling and repair workshops.	Events and attendance record.	11, 12	Estates & Facilities, UPSU	2022-23
	Create and share zero waste map to encourage conversations around reducing single use items.	Zero waste map published on SharePoint site and social media.	11, 12	Estates & Facilities	2021-22
	Conduct an audit of disposables with UCSP in the catering outlets to identify opportunities to target single use items.	Minutes from SAG working group.	12	Estates & Facilities, UCSP	2022-23
	Introduce additional metal cutlery in catering outlets for those dinning inside the establishments.	Visual change from single use, and reduction in single use cutlery purchased.	12	Estates and Facilities, UCSP	2022-23

	Review the current collection of data on currently re-used Items, such as IT and furniture, to ensure data is captured centrally.	Report of re-use baseline.	11, 12	Estates and Facilities, TIS	2022-23
	Introduce Warp-it platform to allow the distribution of spare materials and furniture around the campus, to prevent good items ending up as waste and to prevent new procurement of items in storage.	Numbers of staff registered with Warp It.	11, 12	Estates & Facilities, Procurement	2021-22
	Engage students and staff through a paper reduction campaign.	Reduced purchase of paper items, and record of events.	11, 12	Estates & Facilities	2022-23
	Work with UCSP to implement an increased single use cup levy and simplify the price difference from current system to be sustainable for the catering sales as well as to adequately incentivise reusable cups.	Publicised re-usable cup incentive consistent across the University campus and its sites.	11, 12	UCSP	2021-22
	Evaluate procurement guidance documentation to include consideration of packaging materials as well as end of life process, and encourage the use of low packaged options and reusing items stored by the University.	Refreshed procurement guidance.	12	Estates & Facilities, Procurement	2022-23
Increase recycle and reuse such that non-recyclable waste per student is reduced to 6kg or less by 2027	Run a social media campaign on waste, particularly utilising Instagram but making sure posts are done across social media, including during freshers week, green week and world recycling day.	Social media posts on these days.	12	Estates & Facilities	2021-22
	Working with marketing to provide additional materials including physical and digital posters on recycling to raise awareness and educate on what goes where.	Commissioned digital and physical content.	12	Estates & Facilities, External Relations	2022-23

	Review opportunities to run relevant waste workshops for student clubs and societies on materials and prevention.	Record of the number of workshop events.	12	Estates & Facilities, UPSU	2022-23
	Visible and informative events including during green week and workshops for open days and other events.	Number of events and attendees.	12	Estates & Facilities	2022-23
	Create a Student Green Champions Network to gamify and encourage recycling behaviours as well as to provide a volunteer forum.	Network establishment.	12, 13	Estates & Facilities	2021-22
	Improvements to be made to the sustainability webpages on waste and recycling, responding to feedback on ease of use.	Visual page changes and data from google analytics.	12	Estates & Facilities	2022-23
	Review options for improving access to glass recycling around the campus to make it more convenient for staff and students.	Review to be discussed in the relevant SAG working group and create new actions. Minutes from SAG working group.	11, 12	Estates & Facilities	2023-24
	Work with our waste contractor to review waste audits and identify additional materials for recycling.	Conduct waste audits with contractor and identify at least 1 target material.	11, 12	Estates & Facilities	2023-24
	Introduce takeaway hot drink cup recycling bins.	Bins established on the main campus.	12, 13	Estates and Facilities, UCSP	2021-22
	Review the number of food bins throughout campus and potential to expand.	Discuss review with relevant SAG working group and create new actions. Minutes from SAG working group.	12, 13	Estates and Facilities, UCSP	2023-24

	Develop a packaging framework with the Marine Institute researchers to create a list of approved packaging methods for purchasing decisions	Creation of framework.	12, 14	Estates & Facilities, Marine Research Institute	2022-23
	Use material that is easier to recycle - for example, waxed or plastic cardboard can sit between the two waste streams, and avoiding them would simplify messaging and limit contamination.	Materials audit report.	12, 13	Procurement, UCSP, UPSU	2022-23
	Review paper specification with External Relations and Procurement, including review of printed marketing materials. Glossy paper can be recycled, but presents a confusing material to sort and would be simplified if promoters used a clear material.	Paper audit report.	12	External Relations, UPSU	2022-23

Raise awareness of waste and recycling standards and legal responsibilities of staff and students through the deployment of eLearning modules and webpage refresh	Raise awareness of ISO 14001 and compliance requirements.	Sustainability SharePoint, eLearning module.	12	Estates & Facilities	2021-22
	Update waste code of practice.	Republished Code of Practice.	12	Estates & Facilities	2022-23
	Ensure legal compliance register with 14001 is up to date.	Compliance register updated.	12	Estates & Facilities	Ongoing
	Create a waste compliance training module for our internal pages.	Training module published on our SharePoint site.	12	Estates & Facilities	2021-22

Future Projects

Future projects need to continue to support the move towards a circular economy. The circular economy describes a system in opposition to the linear model of production-consumption-waste, whereby resources are put back int the production or consumption part of the cycle after use. This system is far more sustainable, as it cuts the use of raw materials as well as cutting the disposal of items, both of which can have negative environmental and social consequences. We can support this with projects that focus on materials (both consumables and their packaging) that can re-enter the cycle in the form of production (recycling) or consumption (re-using).