Sustainable Societies Guide

THE SU BATH

Being a Student Leader is a great way to play your part in shaping the university and making it the place you want it to be. One thing that many young people care deeply about is sustainability, but making your group a sustainable one can be a challenge.

However, there is no need to worry, as this resource will take you through everything you need to do to make your group as environmentally friendly as possible.





Why be sustainable?

We are at a unique stage in modern history where we can both see the effects of climate change beginning to affect us whilst still not being too late to stop it, and as such there is still hope, be that in the collaborative efforts of nations, the small actions of individuals, or the fact that there is a generation of young people who really do give a damn. It is this hope that allows us to keep on pushing for not only a sustainable planet, but as a result a healthier planet, a safer planet, a planet without famine and without floods, a planet to call home.

And whilst the global ecocide we see before us feels well and truly out of our hands there is in fact a truly meaningful impact of local action. Small seemingly insignificant acts can accumulate into a movement larger than you could ever imagine, little things can in the right circumstances act as catalysts that radiate outwards leading to more people, taking more action, and creating more change.

Sustainable action though is not a sacrifice, being a green society can be a huge benefit to the society itself, not only is it a quality many students value, but it is also heavily incentivised by the university, be this through the annual society awards, the separate sustainability rewards, or the Uni of Bath green badge all things that you can add to list of reason why your society is great.

Waste and Reuse

The waste your society produces, and how you deal with it, are both key factors in determining how sustainable your society is. As such, waste management should be one of the first things you consider when planning events.
Before using any item, ask yourself whether it is truly necessary. Do you need it, or can you avoid creating that waste altogether? In other words, whenever possible, refuse waste at its source. If refusing is not possible, rethink your approach. Could you use a more sustainable alternative than originally planned? For example, why use plastic if paper works just as well?

If waste is unavoidable and cannot be rethought, try to reduce the amount you produce to minimise its negative impact as much as possible. That covers controlling the waste you create, but what about dealing with waste once it exists?

The best-case scenario is to reuse it, whether that means using it again yourself or passing it on to another society for a completely different event. The more use you can get from an item, the better. If something cannot be reused, consider whether it can be repaired. Failing that, recycle it wherever possible.

Hopefully, these steps sound familiar. You may recognise them as the 6 Rs of sustainability. They are not just a neatly packaged slogan, but a practical framework for decision-making. Following these principles will help ensure that your activities are as sustainable as possible.



Transport and Travel

Travel is another area where many societies can make a meaningful difference. The general principle is to maximise the number of people travelling in each vehicle. Wherever possible, use public transport, whether that be buses, trains, or other shared services.

If public transport is not a viable option, consider car-sharing instead. You could even share transport between societies when collaborating on events. Anything that reduces the number of vehicles being used has the potential to significantly lower carbon emissions and reduce the environmental impact of travel.

Food and Catering

In many of the events you run you may be providing food, and it is not surprising that this too needs to be considered.

The most effective way to reduce environmental impact is to offer plant-based catering. Whilst this may not be everyone's first choice, plant-based food can be both delicious and healthy, making it well worth considering.

If you do not want to go fully plant-based, vegetarian options are also an excellent choice. Alternatively, avoiding high-carbon meats such as beef can be a reasonable compromise. In addition to reducing meat consumption, sourcing food locally and using sustainable suppliers can significantly reduce both the carbon footprint and the wider ecological impact of your event.





Equipment and Merchandise

Societies need equipment, and that is simply a fact. However, acquiring that equipment does not have to come at the expense of the planet.

Second-hand equipment and kit swaps can be excellent ways to reduce waste while also saving money. If these are not an option, prioritising ethically and sustainably sourced equipment is the next best choice.

It is also important to consider the items you give away, especially at the Groups Fair. Whilst freebies can be fun and help attract interest, priority should be given to items that are useful, reusable, and unlikely to end up in landfill.

Advertising

We all want to advertise our society to as many people as possible, and flyers and paper sign-up sheets can be effective tools. However, it is still important to consider how necessary they really are.

Consider using QR codes and digital sign-ups instead, or promoting your society through Instagram posts and the Students' Union website. These methods can often be just as effective while eliminating the waste associated with printed materials.





Events and Volunteering

Being a sustainable society is not just about ensuring that the things you do are sustainable; it is also about being an active force for good.

Organising litter picks, running fundraisers for environmental charities, and supporting other green initiatives can all help make the local community more sustainable. These activities not only benefit the environment but can also be enjoyable and rewarding opportunities for members to get involved.

In addition to volunteering, workshops on sustainability can be a great way to encourage a culture of environmental responsibility amongst your members. In many ways, inspiring others to adopt sustainable practices can be just as important as ensuring your society's own activities are sustainable.

Behaviour Change

From a psychological perspective, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) suggests that intentions to engage in pro-environmental behaviours are strongest when individuals have positive attitudes towards the behaviour, perceive social support for it, and believe they are capable of carrying it out. In other words, people are more likely to take action when they feel their efforts will make a difference and the actions themselves are easy and accessible.

As Student Leaders often serve as social role models, signalling subjective norms and encouraging positive behaviours, they are well placed to influence others' intentions to act in environmentally sustainable ways. By modelling sustainable behaviours, Student Leaders can help create positive social norms and cultivate communities, whether within a student society or a subject cohort, that value sustainability.

Supporting members to take achievable actions as part of a group is also one of the most effective ways to address eco-anxiety while making a tangible difference.



Quick Wins

Travel & Tips

- Prioritise train/public transport for trips where possible
- Encourage lift-sharing to social and fixtures
- Combine transport with other societies for events

Food & Catering

- Vegetarian/vegan-first catering
- Estimate numbers carefully to reduce food waste
- Choose reusable serving options

Merch & Purchasing

- Prioritise reusable items over freebies
- Consider second-hand costimes/kit swaps
- Ensure constumes and merch are bought from an ethical site

Advertising & Communication

- QR codes instead of printed flyers
- Avoid unnecessary paper sign-ups

Waste & Reuse

- Reuse decorations between socials
- Borrow equipment before buying new
- Recycle correctly after events

Society Experiences

"Our society has always had an appreciation for sustainability due to the slow nature of crochet and knitting. Every crafter knows just how long clothes take to make. Since the start of our society we have avoided buying new yarn wherever possible with most of our supplies (especially yarn) being donations from students and friends.

Over the last year we have tried to raise awareness about sustainability outside of crafts with our coral reef project. This was a collaborative effort across the society with members making a variety of corals and ocean creatures in both second hand yarn and 'plarn' (yarn made from plastic bags) to make the project as sustainable as possible. The background was made from recycled cardboard and an old bed sheet to minimise the amount of new materials.

We created a scene of corals from colourful to white to show the effects of climate change and pollution on the reefs, accompanied by an information poster. This was then displayed in the library foyer to raise awareness, and we hope it can continue to do so in its new home!"



About the Authors





Fletcher Whiting and Maisie Hughes of People and Planet: People and planet is a society which aims to tackle both climate and social justice on campus. This is actioned through student campaigns as well as positive actions to encourage cultural shifts within the university - much like the aim of this resource.

If you are interested in getting involved, **check out our society**.



Sophie Williams: Over the last year completing my master's in Sustainability and Management at the University of Bath, I have dedicated my time to help raise awareness around sustainability and the individual differences students can make. I have been a Sustainability Student Trainer, V-Wildlife Project Leader, and contributing to this sustainability guide, I hope that my efforts can make a difference!

Resources

The Sustainability Badge recognises SU groups who make an effort towards practicing sustainability.

While normal worry motivates action, overwhelming climate anxiety can cause burnout and daily impairment. It is important to seek professional support if things get too much. Visit **Student Support** for more information.

- The **Climate Psychology Alliance** offers support and guidance through 1:1 sessions.

There are lots of positive ways to manage climate anxiety, some prefer direct action as according to research, it helps turn feelings of helplessness into fuel for a sense of community, purpose, and agency where as others prefer to support the cause by educating others and supporting the cause in other impactful ways.

- **The Climate Hub** provides a local space in Bath for education, discussion, and shared climate action.

- As a student, you have access to **People & Planet**, a national network of student-led campaigners fighting for climate and social justice.

- Open to everyone, **Greenpeace** is a global campaigning network taking collective action.

Big thankyou to **Sustainable Projects Fund** for supporting our students to run workshops, give their ideas and opinions and create this guide.

To find out more about the great work the University do visit - **Sustainable Bath**



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