

Environmental Sustainability: Your Journey Starts Here

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing our world today – and universities have a vital role to play in shaping the response.

At the University of Greater Manchester, environmental sustainability is rooted in our commitment to putting students at the heart of everything we do, from learning and teaching to campus life and community impact.

This video introduces how we are taking meaningful, collective action to protect the planet, reduce inequality and prepare students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Take a moment to think about what sustainability means to you?

Did you think of protecting the planet, saving energy, social fairness? If so, you are on the right track. Sustainability involves adopting practices that protect the environment and promote social equity. Simple actions like recycling and conserving energy contribute to a healthier planet.

Human-made climate change is driven primarily by the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas. These activities release large amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, trapping heat and causing global temperatures to rise.

Under the Paris Agreement, countries agreed to limit global warming to well below 2°C and to pursue efforts to keep it below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This threshold matters because even small increases in temperature significantly raise the risks of droughts, floods, heatwaves and biodiversity loss.

The university aligns with global goals like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and aims to create meaningful change locally and globally.

The university has identified four strategic targets for environmental sustainability.

Embedding sustainability, carbon literacy and climate justice into curricula, research and staff student development to prepare graduates for a low-carbon economy.

Reducing carbon emissions, improving biodiversity, ethical procurement, sustainable transport and data-driven progress towards net zero.

Shaping a campus culture where sustainability is lived, co-created and championed through participation, skills recognition and community action.

Using the University's influence locally, nationally and internationally to collaborate, lead and amplify positive environmental change.

Sustainability is not just about the environment - it's about people, communities, and the future we are all building together. From climate change and rising global emissions to fairness and equality around the world, the challenges we face are connected.

At university, you are not only gaining a degree - you are preparing to live and work in a rapidly changing world.

Everything we do uses energy. From charging your phone to travelling to campus or using online tools, energy use creates a carbon footprint. Understanding this helps you make smarter, more sustainable choices in your daily life.

Sustainability matters and your everyday choices at university can make a difference. The energy used in classrooms, libraries, and study spaces adds to the university's carbon footprint.

You can reduce energy use by:

- Turning off lights or screens in empty study rooms.
- Shutting down computers after use.
- Avoiding charging devices all day and only charge when needed.
- Use energy-saving settings on your laptop, and use natural light where possible.

Remember, shared spaces equals shared responsibility.

Conserving water is just as important as conserving energy. Water is used across the university and at home every day - from toilets to laundry.

Here are some tips to save water:

- Do not leave taps running in shared toilets.

- Report leaks or dripping taps.
- Use water refill stations instead of buying bottled water.
- Take shorter showers,
and only wash full loads of laundry or dishes.

Remember, save water and save energy too.

What you throw away matters, so think about what waste you are generating and how you can recycle more.

Here are some tips:

- Use the correct recycling bins.
- Bring a reusable coffee cup or water bottle.
- Avoid single-use plastics.
- Avoid printing unless necessary.
and take notes digitally instead of using paper where possible.

Think before you throw away and recycle when possible.

Artificial intelligence (AI) uses a lot of energy and this has a significant impact on the environment.

Let's look at some examples of the energy footprint of AI.

If you made a request through ChatGPT, it consumes 10 times the electricity of a Google search.

Training an AI means teaching a computer model to recognise patterns by showing it large amounts of data and the correct answers. Training a single AI model can emit as much CO₂ as five cars over their lifetime.

AI training requires massive data centres, consuming significant electricity. Data centres provide the powerful computing infrastructure needed to train AI models, including large numbers of specialised processors.

A large language model is a type of AI designed to understand and generate human language. According to Tech UK (2021), training one model is the equivalent of 300,000 kg of CO₂, which is like making 125 flights between America and China.

There are many ways you can get involved as a student and make a real difference.

- You could attend a sustainability event, or why not plan your own event.
- Student panels are a great way to get your views heard and listen to the views of others.

- There are lots of local and regional community projects you can get involved with.
- Outdoor wellbeing activities also provide opportunities to discuss environmental issues

Starting at the University of Greater Manchester is a great chance to shape who you are and the impact you want to have. Will you learn new ideas, take action, or help lead change? There is no single path - every choice makes a difference.

As a leader, you could join a sustainability panel and take direct action on important environmental issues.

As a volunteer, you could get involved with local community action groups, such as creating greener spaces, volunteering at a repair café, or tree planting and rewilding projects.

As a learner, you could attend workshops and events to gain a broader understanding, meet like-minded people, and show your support.

Sustainability is part of everyday life - and it starts with you. The choices you make, from how you travel and study to how you use technology, all have an impact on the world around you.

At the University of Greater Manchester, you have the opportunity to learn, act, and make a difference in ways that shape your future and the future of others.

Remember, small actions, taken consistently, can lead to big change.

What's one change you will make whilst studying at UGM