

# A story of sustainability

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Hospitality & Commercial Services



# Our commitment

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**Whilst we all work in different departments, we are all part of one university. Therefore what we each do on a daily basis can reflect on others and how we feel about our university.**

Together, we have rightly declared a climate emergency. Some departments are naturally at the forefront of public scrutiny. Clearly Hospitality and Commercial Services (Conferences and Events) are up there. Therefore, I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you our story to date and what is next.

To gain more influence to enact change, we are regularly engaged with University Hospitality and Procurement bodies, Newcastle Food Partnerships, Newcastle Fairtrade City group, university researchers and national and local suppliers.

Since 2014 we have had sustainability as a key objective and you may be surprised, but we have achieved quite a lot since then.

Our interest covers food as well as general waste. (e.g. plastic). We have invested in managers to drive our agenda forward. To that end, we have a Procurement officer and a Development Chef with sustainability at the core of their agendas.

The service has agreed to implement 'truly' sustainable improvements. To that end we will not introduce something 'for show' or without due care and consideration of our customers. So sometimes things may take a little longer than expected.

We have a genuine determination to reduce plastic, food waste and encourage more sustainable diets. We are truly passionate about eliminating negative environmental impacts and welcome your comments, support and ideas to help us achieve a carbon neutral impact in years to come.

**- Julia Taylor, Head of Hospitality & Commercial Services**

# The story so far

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## How we cook it

The way we prepare our food can have a huge impact on reducing our footprint.

- We no longer utilise 'cook-chill' methods of cooking, and prepare and cook all meals daily.
- 100% of our sandwiches in Event Catering are made in house, using bread from local bakeries.
- In our cafes and restaurants we have a combination of homemade (in-house) and bought in sandwiches.
- We are investing in increasing our ability to provide more homemade sandwiches over the next 12 months.

## The story so far

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### Take away—doing it differently

We've taken steps to help our customers enjoy our service sustainably.

- Our takeaway cups have been compostable since 2014.
- We have offered discounts for using re-use cups since 2014 in selected outlets, and expanded to all units in 2018.
- We have been charging for the use of disposable cups since 2018, and have used the income to give away free re-use cups.
- We offer a 30p discount for using your own re-use cup.
- We have signed up to the 'Refill' app and customers can get free tap water in our units.
- We do not provide any single use takeaway meal containers in the Fredrick Douglas centre as a trial and any takeaway meals from other units are served in compostable or recyclable containers.
- As we replace our fleet, we have committed to buying electric vehicles. Currently 20% of our fleet is electric.
- Our (and yours) biggest area of concern is plastic containers for event catering. Following customer requests, a few years ago we brought in lightweight re-usable containers for Event Catering that the University's waste contractor had previously advised us were recycled. However, they are still plastic. We have been working exceptionally hard over the last 12 months with the Sustainability team to find suitable non plastic alternatives. We trialled some over the summer with varied results. We are now in the process of remodeling how we provide our delivered catering service. It truly is a very important issue and one which must be approached and delivered correctly. Please follow our team news on the staff intranet over the next few months, as options are discussed and processes changed.

## The story so far

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### Reducing waste

As a catering business, we must be mindful of how we manage waste.

- Food waste from our production kitchens has been collected and processed via anaerobic digester since 2014. Since establishing the current contract in 2018, we've been able to more accurately monitor the levels of waste produced and will investigate methods to reduce food waste further. We have tight margins for managing our food waste and have been audited in this matter
- Used cooking oil is collected to be turned into bio-diesel.
- We segregate paper and cardboard, plastic, and metal waste to process through the University's recycling streams. Recently we have also purchased a crisp packet bin as a trial in the Courtyard.
- We are working with the Sustainability team and regionally to improve compostable waste removal services.
- We actively manage our portion control to minimise potential food waste in cafes and restaurants.
- Where possible, food waste is re-distributed by either ourselves or event managers.
- We have changed the dining options within the Courtyard to reduce food waste. Meals at the Private Dining room now require prior booking.

## The story so far

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### Plastic—reduce and remove

Plastic is huge on our agenda, and we're continuously looking for ways to reduce it, with an ambition to have zero sale of plastic packaged items..

- We have reduced single use plastic sold in our units by approximately 80% (no utensils, straws, sachets, plastic cups, etc. since early 2019). Some plastic packaging is still required for allergen management at the moment but we're hoping for plant based packaging options to become more widely available.
- Disposable cups lids are our biggest issue. Please help us by either sitting-in and using china cups or bringing your own re-use cup (and save 30p). If you have seen an alternative somewhere else, please, let us know.
- Two units are working towards being 'plastic free', The Grand and The Courtyard. As an example, when you visit you will see that we have removed the sale of plastic bottles, our homemade and bought in sandwiches are provided in plant-based packaging and we no longer have plastic cutlery or individual ketchup portions. We estimate that we have reduced the sale and use of all plastics by 80% in these units.
- Bulk buying and selling items deli-style ,instead of buying pre-wrapped individual portions (e.g. traybakes) has helped us to reduce packaging waste.
- In catered halls and cafes which serve hot meals, reusable and washable cutlery and crockery is available for customers.

## The story so far

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### Sustainable foods

Our goal is to offer more sustainable options and ensure our procurement process follows sustainable standards.

- Castle Leazes Halls of residence since 2014 has had Meat Free Mondays.
- Vegetarian hot meal options are always available in our halls and cafes.
- Our Development Chef has introduced higher quality and increased availability of sustainable meals. We have improved our sustainable meal offers and have reduce the frequency of red meat in our cafes and restaurants.
- All outlets offer fresh fruit, and catered student halls include one piece of fresh fruit with each meal. We also ensure a portion of fresh fruit is cheaper than a packet of crisps or confectionary (as these are plastic wrapped).
- We encourage the use of our dedicated hospitality venues for events and meetings; this is because if they're held in the same building as a production kitchen, we can offer the most sustainable delivery option.
- We buy from local producers of canned and bottled water, eggs, milk, bread, and some meats. Where supplies come from wider supply chains, we more often use local/regional distributors to provide social benefits
- We use livestock produce (meat and dairy) from farms that satisfy UK legislative standards for animal welfare, or equivalent.
- We do not use 'red list' or endangered species of farmed or wild fish.
- All our eggs are free range.

## The story so far

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### How it's delivered to us

We aim to influence our suppliers to introduce positive changes to make their products more sustainable.

- Improvements in this area have happened but they are at a much slower rate. This is because we are reliant, to a certain degree, upon our suppliers and legislation. However, we have changed our internal practices where viable alternatives exist and have engaged with a wide range of suppliers to enact change. It is obviously in their interests to do so; therefore, these relationships are building momentum.
- Through tendering we encourage our suppliers to reduce any negative environmental impact; this resulted in our sandwich supplier changing most of their packaging to plant-based. Our home-made (non-deli) sandwiches are all packed in plant-based packaging.
- Bulk purchasing is already in place.
- Consolidated deliveries are in place from our central stores.

# We want to be waste free. Can **you** help?

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- Can you use a re-use cup the next time you grab a drink from one of our 17 units? You'll save yourself money, too!
- Can you buy a cold drink in a can instead of a plastic bottle?
- If you manage events, can you sign up to our NEUPN network via the conference team, to get up to date information on how to manage events more sustainably?
- Can you manage small meetings (under 6) yourself instead of requesting delivered hospitality? You can pick up hot drinks, snacks and meals at our units and pay for them at the till on an internal transfer form. All you need is a cost code and to call the catering office in advance. We can even reserve you a table if necessary.
- Can you use our event spaces or cafes and restaurants for catered meetings?
- Can you ensure you recycle waste products at the end of your meal (where facilities are available)?
- Can you join our Yoyo customer rewards scheme, to have offers delivered to your phone and help us print less?
- Can you get in touch with us if you think you can help in any way? We have worked with research colleagues and welcome their support, enthusiasm and expertise, The bigger the team, the bigger the ideas and impact—so please don't feel shy! Contact us at [catering@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:catering@ncl.ac.uk) or [conference-team@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:conference-team@ncl.ac.uk).

Whilst we have achieved a lot, there is much more to be done. Our sustainable plan will be issued shortly through the staff intranet, so if you're interested, please follow our team news. Together we can make a difference.

