

Our approach to  
managing single-use  
plastics on our Exeter  
campuses

## Foreword



“I am delighted to support the flagship Single-Use Plastics Strategy that has been developed by the University of Exeter. I am Professor of Ecotoxicology in the College of Life and

Environmental Sciences and my research team has been at the forefront in studying the impact of marine plastic debris. We have yet to find a seawater sample from anywhere in the world that doesn't contain microscopic pieces of plastic. Our research has highlighted the harm that these tiny particles cause to marine life and the potential for them to be taken up into the food chain. The best way to tackle this pollution problem is to stop litter reaching the sea in the first place.”

Professor Tamara Galloway,  
Chair in Ecotoxicology



“To address the challenge of Plastics in Society we need a fundamental shift in the way we design, use and recover plastics. This requires a profound shift in the material choices we make and deeper understanding

at the outset of where plastics end up. We need to design out waste. The Exeter University campaign is an excellent example of a building block for a new plastics circular economy where nothing leaks into the oceans, air or land. I am delighted to support this initiative and helping to promote and amplify its impact. Congratulations to the team and the University for taking leadership on this topic.”

Professor Peter Hopkinson, Director,  
Exeter Centre for Circular Economy

An underwater scene with a large school of small fish swimming in the middle ground. In the foreground, two larger, striped fish are visible, swimming towards the left. The background shows a coral reef structure. The water is clear and blue, with sunlight filtering through from above.

## Introduction

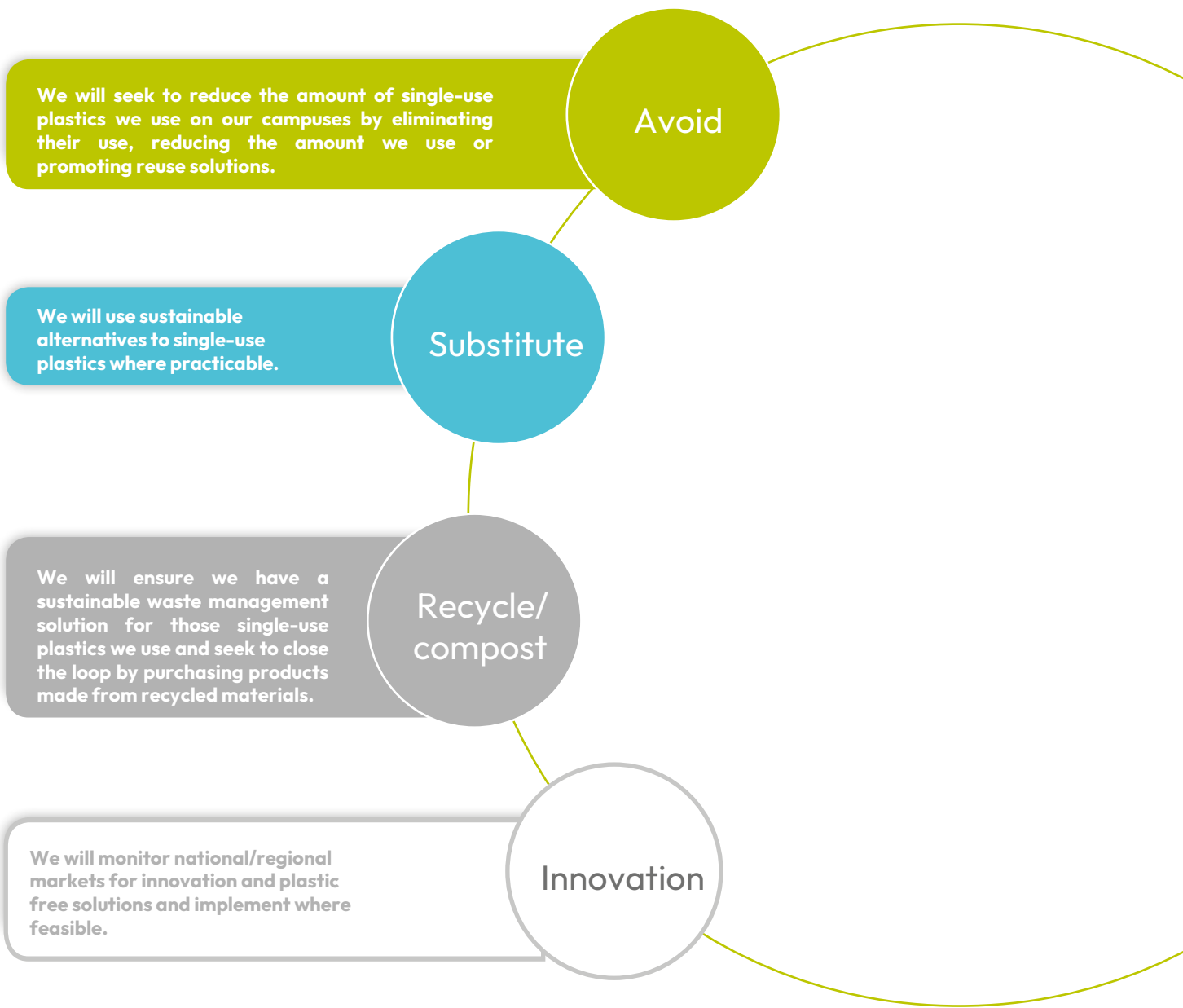
As an organisation we are renowned for world leading research in the fields of plastics additives and marine plastic pollution and micro-plastics. This research has influenced and contributed directly to the filming of the Blue Planet 2 series. This presents a tremendous opportunity to showcase our achievements to date in addressing single-use plastics and to outline our plans for delivering our commitment to reduce single-use plastics on our Exeter campuses.

The range of single-use plastics on our campuses is diverse and the issue of addressing them is a complex one. As an organisation, we recognise that we won't be able to eliminate all single-use plastics however we will adopt a whole institution approach, apply circular economy principles, develop pragmatic solutions with impact and work in partnership with third parties who provide retail, catering and residential services on our campuses. This will ensure we use less single-use plastics, utilise alternative materials and adopt sustainable disposal solutions wherever possible. This is a joint plan which is supported by the University of Exeter and the Students' Guild.

A separate plan will be developed by FXPlus for the Penryn Campus.

# Our commitments

We will ensure that the best environmental outcome is achieved by adopting a hierarchical approach to managing single-use plastics.





## Working together

Initiatives will be established and monitored by project leads however the success of the strategy will be dependent on the active participation of all staff and students. We will also work with all relevant partners to encourage them to address single-use plastics on our campuses including:

- Starbucks
- Camper
- FXPlus
- INTO
- Northcott Theatre
- Pret a Manger
- UPP
- Other third party vendors

## Education for sustainability

The University will provide opportunities to learn from the implementation of this strategy as well as provide opportunities for students to inform the direction of the strategy in the future. This will be achieved via the Grand Challenges Programme and Green Consultants initiative.

## Our research

We will seek new opportunities and continue our research into the impact of single-use plastics on marine and terrestrial life, the development of alternative materials and new ways to design, use and recover plastics.

## Our communication

The University will provide opportunities for staff, students and visitors to learn more about single-use plastics, identify practical action that individuals can take to learn and to share best practice. This will include:

- Cascading learning and highlighting achievements via relevant sector bodies such as EAUC, TUCO, BACHE, etc.

- Seeking opportunities for knowledge exchange with our partners, suppliers and the wider sector.
- Sharing information and/or host workshops at key events such as the staff festival, freshers' fair, sustainable roadshows, etc.
- Hosting seminars showcasing world class research.
- Providing guidance and information on the Sustainability website.
- Working with the Students' Guild to develop single-use plastic behaviour change initiatives.
- Integrating into relevant existing guidance and communications eg, Sustainable Event Guide, terms and conditions, Eco Conference Package.

## Measuring success

We will monitor the implementation of the plan internally via the Sustainability Team in liaison with the Advocate Climate Taskforce and Faculty Sustainability committees and report annually to the Climate and Environmental Crisis Board and University Council.

We will develop clear key performance indicators and targets for the strategy.



## Supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals

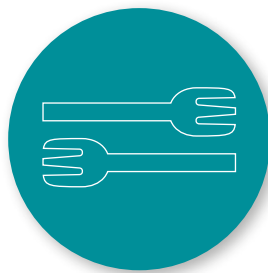
This plan supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals above.

# Our commodity groups

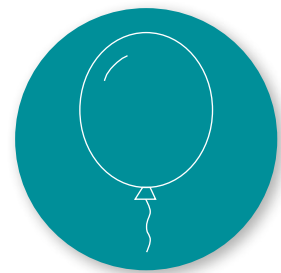
We will take action to address single-use plastics in the following commodity groups.



Beverages



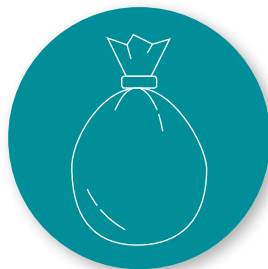
Food



Marketing materials, event consumables and printing



Toiletries and hygiene products



Cleaning products



Laboratory consumables



Other

# Our progress



## Since the introduction of the Plastic Strategy in 2018

### We do

- Offer cans of water for sale
- Ensure reusable teaspoons are available in restaurants and cafes
- Actively promote the Refill Devon campaign
- Review options for meal deals and work with the National Union of Students to seek opportunities to enhance offerings in Students' Guild outlets
- Review options to encourage staff to use local water fountains for meetings
- Promote reuse of water bottles following conferences and events
- Have a range of reusable coffee cups in all University of Exeter and Students' Guild outlets
- Ensure reusable teaspoons are available in restaurants and cafes

### We have

- Replaced plastic straws and plastic stirrers with plant based alternatives (FSC approved if paper) – and did this ahead of legislation changes.
- Investigated the feasibility of plant based and recyclable coffee cup solutions and determined University of Exeter and Students' Guild policy for retail, catering and vending
- Replaced water cooler cups with plant based or paper alternatives and provide reusable options in hubs and restaurants
- Increased the number of water fountains on campus
- Introduced a range of refillable water bottles for sale in retail outlets
- Maintained our disposable cup levy of 40p in all University of Exeter and Student's Guild outlets
- Completed a trial wine/beer glasses deposit scheme at large events
- Completed a trial coffee cup recycling scheme on our St Luke's campus
- Reviewed recycling facilities for wine/beer glasses at large events

### We will

- Trial reverse vending for plastic bottles in sports facilities as services become available



Avoid

Substitute

Recycle/compost

Innovation



### Since the introduction of the Plastic Strategy in 2018

We do

- Provide reusable cutlery in restaurants
- Use biodegradable, compostable or recyclable packaging for all food items prepared on site.
- Provide condiment sachets 'on request' to reduce the number of items taken but not used
- Monitor national/regional marketplace for innovation and plastic free solutions for sandwiches and wraps and implement where feasible

We have

- Replaced all plastic cutlery with either plant based or wooden materials – and did this ahead of legislation changes.
- Reviewed plant-based alternatives for salad bowls and fruit pots (veg ware or cardboard)
- Removed single-use plastic food-to-go packaging from the approved purchasing lists and replaced with compostable alternatives.

We will

- Trial the introduction of pump dispensers for ketchup and mayonnaise in restaurant areas
- Collaborate with the University Grounds Team to develop a Kitchen Garden and produce on-campus grown fruit and vegetables for inclusion within menus – reducing plastic packaging
- Monitor the introduction of bioplastic solutions for condiment sachets, as the market develops
- Monitor national/regional retail environment for innovation and plastic free solutions for crisps and confectionery and implement where feasible



### Since the introduction of the Plastic Strategy in 2018

We do

- Maintain our policy to bulk purchase and decant cleaning products into reusable bottles and reuse trigger sprays and only replace these once damaged

We have

- Ceased the use of single-use socket mops and introduced a floor mop system using a washable cloth system
- 'Bin free office' initiative in place to reduce the amount of black bags used/wasted





## Since the introduction of the Plastic Strategy in 2018

We do

- Promote sustainable alternatives to balloon decorations
- Maintain our policy to use biodegradable confetti at external wedding and events
- Promote biodegradable festival glitter
- Avoid date stamping banners so that they can be reused
- Maintain our policy of no external balloon or paper lantern releases
- Promote the use of plastic free delegate badges
- Investigate and implement sustainable disposal solution for banners

We have

- Ceased the use of mylar (foiled) balloons and helium use for balloons on our campuses
- Ceased the use of all types of table glitter and non-biodegradable confetti by University of Exeter



## Since the introduction of the Plastic Strategy in 2018

We do

- Replace single-use plastics with reusable alternatives that can be autoclaved, chemically decontaminated and washed between uses.
- Reuse single-use plastics where possible (e.g., tips in serial dilutions)

We have

- Break free plastic pipettes
- Developed a 'Choose more sustainable plastic options' spreadsheet
- Engaged with the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) supporting more sustainable and cost-effective laboratory management, teaching and research.
- Developed a 6 Step Sustainability Guide - including focus on reducing lab plastic
- Established a Sustainable Lab Resource Hub Community
- Developed a plastic waste hierarchy - purchase, reduction, reuse a recycle
- A Green Lab Consumables Guide



## Since the introduction of the Plastic Strategy in 2018

We do

- Maintain our recycling arrangements for printer cartridges
- Review options to specify plastic free packaging – such as shredded card and/or brown paper, corn starch chips etc

We have

- Maintain our policy of providing carrier bags only 'on request' and have a carrier bag charging structure
- Multi-functional devices to reduce the number of printers and printer cartridges
- A Sustainable Procurement Policy with objectives to optimise the use of natural resources and cease, or where this is not possible, minimise the use of plastic and disposable items. This policy is also extended to our suppliers and sub-contractors.

We will

- Monitor the market for innovation in packaging



## Since the introduction of the Plastic Strategy in 2018

We do

- Provide hospitality items on request only
- Monitor the market place for alternatives to plastic bottles/ packaging of toiletry and hygiene products

We have

- All cotton buds sold in the University of Exeter and Students from paper and did this ahead of legislation changes.' Guild outlets will have stems made
- Removed all personal care products from the University of Exeter and Students' Guild outlets that contain plastic microbeads and did this ahead of legislation changes.

# Next Steps

'Our Progress' demonstrates that action that has been taken to achieve the initiatives identified within this Plastic Strategy, which was introduced in 2018.

## Our new Circular Economy & Sustainable Resource Management

**Strategy** will empower our movement away from the linear economy, of take, make, dispose, and establish a new system where materials never become waste and nature is regenerated. In a circular economy, products and materials are kept in circulation through processes like maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture, recycling, and composting. The circular economy tackles climate change and other global challenges, like biodiversity loss, waste, and pollution, by decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources.

The Circular Economy and Sustainable Resource Management Strategy is focussed on the reduction and ultimate removal of all items that are manufactured with the intention of single-use and are then used as such. The University recognises the vital importance of the removal of single-use plastics to prevent and reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities and as such we will be now developing a new Single Use Plastic Strategy supported with its own dedicated action plan, to be released in 2025.

The University is currently engaged in conversation to consider establishing the University as a **Plastic Free Community**. This initiative is led by Surfers Against Sewage as a movement to help free where we live from single-use plastic. Currently, in summer 2024, there are 450 active communities around the UK, including 12 universities – a network of plastic free communities that has been created to tackle plastic pollution at source.

There are five pillars associated with the development of a successful community that the University will be developing. These will be key enablers by helping to engage with all staff and students as key stakeholders.

- Engaging the local council – work with the Student Union and Students' Guild to pass a resolution to support the journey to Plastic Free Community status.
- Business champions – work with businesses within the community to help them reduce single-use plastics.
- Community Allies – inspire the wider community to spread the plastic-free message.
- Community actions & events – mobilise the community, hold clean-ups, mass unwrap or other events to raise awareness.
- Steering group – form a group of local stakeholders and meet at least twice a year to take the community campaign forward.



We are now developing a completely revised **2025 Single-use Plastic Strategy** with further focus on driving change across the University with enhanced alignment towards the principles of the circular economy.

Capture existing good practice, promote the sharing of information to encourage further engagement, and the identification of the scope for further improvement.





[www.exeter.ac.uk/sustainability](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/sustainability)

Document first published 2018  
Document reviewed Aug 2024  
Next review: Summer 2025