

# Single-Use Plastics Management Standard

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## **1. Introduction**

In 2018, the University of Leeds made a joint pledge with Leeds University Union to become single-use plastic-free in our catering and office spaces by 2020, and in all other areas by 2023.

Through this pledge, we are taking the lead in tackling the global challenge of unnecessary single-use plastic, which causes widespread pollution and most commonly uses carbon intensive fossil fuels to produce. This also responds to our commitment to tackle climate change through our [Seven Climate Principles](#), our [commitment to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) and supports our transition to a circular economy model for the University.

Our pledge covers all areas of the University and will involve collaboration, research and operational changes to be successful. This standard sets out what we all (as University staff and students) need to do so that we can achieve and maintain this commitment. This standard is further supported by guidance and procedures relevant to specific functions of the University, where required to support implementation of the standard.

## **2. Scope**

This Standard applies to:

- items purchased for University use which are primarily made of plastic and are only used once before becoming waste, and
- plastic packaging around items purchased for University use, where this is not reused.

In areas where purchasing decisions are not wholly made by the University, we will try to minimise the impacts from single-use plastics. We will also influence and collaborate with our partner organisations, to help them move away from single-use plastics. An example of this is where teaching activities need to replicate current NHS processes accurately.

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Where items are purchased for direct sale onwards (such as those in retail/food outlets) we will work with and encourage suppliers to remove single-use plastic from their operations and provide alternative solutions, helping to drive change within the industry. We will also offer alternative products which are single-use plastic free, where these are available.

We recognise that application of this Standard will take time and a pragmatic approach will need to be taken when auditing compliance with the Standard.

### **3. Principles**

The following principles must be used in the selection and use of plastic items within the scope of this Standard. As a University community we are all responsible for adhering to these principles:

- Reusable items must be evaluated for suitability and prioritised before single-use items are considered or purchased.
- Single-use items of any kind must only be used where they are essential to the work being carried out and no other suitable alternative is available.
- We will use our expertise and science to inform decision making. Choices on suitable alternatives should be made based on the environmental and social impact over the full product life cycle. In all cases the choice which is estimated to have the lowest environmental impact over the full product life cycle should be made.
- Purchasing decisions must not be made solely based on short-term cost, sustainability considerations must also be included.
- Where suitable alternatives are not available or there are recognised and agreed insurmountable barriers to removing single-use plastic items, we will record these and promote these as research opportunities. We will actively seek to explore research opportunities to remove these barriers.
- We will use our influence and knowledge to challenge and collaborate with our suppliers to find single-use plastic free solutions.
- We will collectively share knowledge and build the capacity of our community, including our students, so we are all able to make informed, responsible purchasing and use decisions.
- We will actively engage with our student community in this area and seek to collaborate with Leeds University Union to do this.
- We will use our influence and knowledge to challenge the currently accepted culture around single-use plastic.

- Where plastic use cannot be avoided, when this becomes waste every effort will be made to re-use or recycle it, or otherwise apply the waste hierarchy as appropriate. We will continue to work with the waste industry to find solutions for plastic waste and to increase recycling opportunities.
- Where we do not have control on purchasing decisions to remove single-use plastic, we will aim to positively influence those who do.
- We will share what we learn in this area through our networks (such as with partners in the city and the wider sector), so that the benefits we gain are extended to global society.

## **4. Requirements**

The following requirements must be followed by all staff and students working on behalf of the University:

- Single-use items of any kind must only be used where they are unavoidable and essential to the work being carried out.
- When selecting an item to purchase, the following aspects must be considered, based on the overall environmental and social impact of the product lifecycle (by following relevant procedures and guidance which sit under this standard):
  - Whether the item is needed in the first place,
  - How long is the item expected to last and whether it is reusable,
  - Use of recycled raw materials,
  - Recyclability of items at end of life, and
  - Persistence of unrecyclable materials (items which break down into harmless materials quickly are preferred).
- If no alternative to single-use plastic items can be sourced, in order for this to be categorised as essential single-use plastic, a documented assessment must be completed by the purchaser and supplied to the Sustainability Service. This will be used to stimulate research in this area.
- For all purchases, plastic-free packaging must be specified. For any purchases where plastic free packaging is not available, the supplier must be challenged on this. Where supplier managed takeback and re-use schemes are available, these are preferred.
- Where plastic packaging is received inadvertently, this must be reported to the supplier and to the procurement team. Resulting waste must be managed following the principles in our Reuse, Recycling & Waste Standard.

## 5. Roles & Responsibilities

**All University staff:** Follow the principles and requirements in this standard and related standards and procedures as they apply in your role. Work with the Sustainability Service to identify and remove barriers to removal of single-use plastics. Support and empower our students to enable them to make sustainable choices through their learning activities and respond positively to challenge from students where they identify improvements.

Further responsibilities apply to all staff who purchase items or approve purchases on behalf of the University, who must ensure the principles and requirements in this standard are applied for all purchases made.

**Sustainability Service:** Support all areas of the University to apply this standard and facilitate change processes as needed. Regularly audit compliance with the standard through Environmental Management System audits.

**All students:** Cooperate with University staff by making sustainable choices where available, to help us achieve the principles and requirements in this standard. Challenge the University by reporting areas where the standard is not implemented or where improvements can be made, both within their school and to the Sustainability Service.

## 6. Definitions

To assist with collaboration, our definitions are the same as those within the Resources and waste strategy for England, where the terms are defined in that strategy. In the context of this standard we are using the following definitions:

**Single-use plastic:** An item which is made primarily of plastic and which is only used once before it becomes waste.

**Reusable item:** An item that is reused multiple times before it becomes waste.

**Essential single-use plastic:** A single-use plastic item that cannot currently be removed from University operations as there is no current suitable alternative, and which has a documented assessment to support this.

**Suitable alternative:** An alternative to single-use plastics that is known or predicted to have a lower environmental and/or social impact over the product life-cycle. This is not always a simple answer and can depend on the boundaries placed on analysis. Where possible, research literature and existing life cycle analysis will be reviewed in order to support decision making.

**Circular economy:** A circular economy is an alternative to a traditional linear economy ('make, use, dispose') in which we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life.