

City Students' Union: environmental impacts

1. Introduction

The City, University of London Students' Union represents nearly twenty thousand students. The Union itself operates on one single site and contains an Office, Reception, Kitchen and Shop. The Union recognises that all of our products, activities and services have an impact on the environment and we have committed to managing the environmental, economic and social implications of such activities.

We recognised procurement, energy, transport, waste and paper as the five biggest environmental impacts listed in their perceived magnitude. Through the policies, actions and initiatives discussed below we have recognised and actively made steps towards reducing the environmental impacts we are responsible for.

2. Procurement

The Union purchases a variety of different items namely food, clothing and stationary. We aim to ensure the following when purchasing:

- To comply with City University Sustainable Purchasing Policy;
- Internal purchasers review what goods and materials they are consuming in order to reduce; or choose more environmentally friendly products;
- Recycled products and environmentally friendly materials are chosen where appropriate;
- Explore opportunities to recycle materials.

2.1 Books and stationary

Notepads are bought for conferences, events and for the shop and e-store. None of these currently contain recycled or non-bleached paper. Bleaching paper to change it from its naturally occurring light brown to white has negative impacts on health, flora, fauna and water, whilst not using recycled paper causes more deforestation which in turn impacts biodiversity, health, ecosystems and air quality. This is recognised as an area of improvement however we are currently limited by the supplier we use not offering any suitable alternatives that contain higher recycled content paper.

2.1.2 Stationary order for Union staff

Regular stationary order for Student Union Staff including pens, post-it notes and other regularly used items. Staff have been encouraged to use scrap paper for rough note and list making to reduce the number of post-its etc used.

2.2 Union Shop

When purchasing items from the shop, if a bag is requested, a customer is given a paper bag made of 100% recycled paper. Plastic bags are not used within the SU shop. The items that the Union sells within its shop are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Items sold in the City University Shop.

Where	What	
SU SHOP	Item	Pen
		Swing and Clip File
		Stud wallets
		Pencil Case
		A4 Folder
	Item in plastic packaging	Post-It
		Phone charger
		Record cards
		Headphones
		Charger
		Power bank
		File dividers
		Calculator
		Punched pockets
	Item made from plastic in plastic packaging	Power bank
		Mini highlighters
		Geometry set
		Adaptor
		USB
		Ruler
	Clothing	Hoodie
		Sweatshirt
		Polo shirt
		T-Shirt
		Sweatpants
		Longline sweatshirt
		Slimline T-Shirt

2.3.1 Clothing

The Union purchases clothing for its shop and e-store which includes: jumpers, hoodies, vests, shorts and t-shirts as highlighted above in Table 1. All clothing is Fairtrade except for one item. We recognise that the item which is not Fairtrade carries a significant environmental, social and economic impact. The Union also purchases hoodies and t-shirts for staff which are also not Fairtrade. This a significant impact on sustainability and we want to choose items with the Fairtrade Mark, so that we can contribute towards ensuring farmers and workers in developing countries have

a secure and sustainable livelihood in which they have the power to decide on their future.

We have analysed the price difference between Fairtrade and Non-Fairtrade items from our current supplier and have calculated a 15% difference in price. The cost to benefit was considered and as such a decision was made to replace staff clothing with Fairtrade items when they need replacing as long as options are available that match with the City Union brand.

All clothing comes in recyclable cardboard packaging and does not generate any plastic waste.

2.4 Promotional material

Below is a list of promotional material that has been given out over the course of the academic year:

- Badges
- Card holders
- Lanyards
- Lip balm
- Metal straws
- Pens
- Popsockets
- Portable phone charger
- Stress balls
- Sweets
- Tote bags
- Yoyos

Many of the items used for promotional events are made of plastic and as such have an environmental impact due to the comparison of time between the length of use and the time it takes for the item to decompose. The Environmental Committee established of Union Staff have discussed how staff members can move away from plastic promotional materials to ones made of more sustainable materials, beginning with looking at our Freshers' offering.

Currently all of the surplus promotional items we have used this academic year can be reused for events either later this year or the following year.

2.5 Food and drink

The Union purchases food for events, conferences and engagement activities. All food must be ordered through the company who hold a contract with the University for the provision of food on Campus, Sodexo. The only exception to this is at our business school, where Lexington hold the contract. We are aware that food production, especially the production of meat and animal products carries a huge environmental burden and is currently contributing to the degradation of almost every aspect of the environment: impacting the air, climate, flora and fauna, land and soil. Therefore, we ensure that vegan and vegetarian options are always available at all events where food is purchased. In doing this we hope to encourage more people to choose vegan and meat free alternatives which carry a lower environmental impact.

There is currently no working policy within the Union to prevent food from being over-ordered for events, meaning that food is sometimes left over at the end of events. Normally extra food is brought back to the Union for staff to eat, therefore no food waste is generated. However, this is not always the case and there has been times where food is thrown away, including following the Union's Carrot Awards in April 2019. This is recognised as an area of improvement for the Union. A method to decrease food waste is to provide take away containers made out of sustainable and recyclable materials for attendees to take away extra food. This however has not been implemented.

Also, for most events staff and students are expected to provide their own water bottles which can be filled up with water at the event. However, when there is an internal or external facilitator for events such as the Leadership Academy Awards then bottled water is provided. This is because the Union wants speakers to have access to water at all times. However, there have been a few suggested methods to avoid this including pre-warning speakers to bring their own water as we will not be providing it for them due to the environmental impact of single-use plastic, but this has not yet been implemented. Furthermore, at events plastic cups are provided by Sodexo for attendees to use for drinks such as apple juice and orange juice. This use of single-use plastic items has a big environmental impact which the Union is responsible for, as we could instruct Sodexo to not provide them or request an alternative.

3. Electricity

Main areas of electricity usage at the Union is for computers, lights and heating. An electricity audit was completed to analyse the environmental impact of the Union. The following were seen to be implemented to decrease electricity usage:

- All of the monitors and screens were modern efficient LCD monitors.
- The main ventilation equipment is switched off by timers.
- Printers turn off after a period of not being used.
- Kitchen ventilation is turned off overnight.
- Ventilation across the Union area actively reflects the usage.
- Temperatures are set to appropriate settings.
- All light fittings are fitted with efficient and modern bulbs.
- Lights in the bathroom work through motions sensors.
- Light are placed appropriately around the building a no area is deemed to be over lit.
- A lighting and electrical equipment responsibility plan has been drafted up by staff to ensure that unnecessary electrical equipment, computers and lighting is switched off at the end of the day and during periods where the office is empty.
- There are notices around the office reminding staff to turn off lights.
- To increase energy efficiency existing equipment to maximise energy efficiency.

Electricity is used unnecessarily by the Union when monitors are left on overnight and for extended periods, when lights are left on unnecessarily and screens. There are two areas where heaters are used for staff: finance room and in the SU Reception. The reception is highlighted as an area where this is necessary due to its location near external doors in an area with high foot traffic. Individual

fans are also used by two members of staff in the main office. Furthermore, management initiatives mentioned in the above list that require individual behaviour are not always carried out. When members of staff outside the Union access the office because they are not included within the lighting and responsibility plan it has been noted that they do not always turn off lights or electrical equipment which has a negative impact on electricity usage.

4. Transport

Staff were surveyed to look at modes of commuting and the results are displayed in Table 2. Mode of transport was the average transportation method used by each member of staff. Distances were calculated to Northampton Square and were rounded to the nearest mile. Where a method of public transport is paired with walking, public transport was the primary mode of transport.

Table 2: Results of the Staff Transport Survey.

Same on the way to and from work	Mode of transport	Number of staff	Average distance / miles
Same	Train and walking	2	6
	Tube and Walking	6	9
	Bus, Tube and Walking	1	9
	Car, Train, Tube and Walking	2	47
	Cycling	2	5
	Walking	2	2
Different	Tube and Bus Tube and Walking	1	5

On average staff use mainly public transport. No members of staff reported using private cars when commuting. However, it was reported that when 'running late' a few members of staff used less sustainable modes of transport including 'Viavan' and instead of walking would take additional public transport.

Only two members of staff cycle to work despite the University and as such the Union providing a Cycle to Work Scheme. This scheme has not been taken up by any members of staff at the Union. This is an area where improvement is possible. Furthermore, in regards to cycling the University's terms mean that staff are not reimbursed for travel to meetings, appointments or events when cycling, however other modes of transport are reimbursed. Reimbursing per mileage is a great initiative to encourage more staff to choose cycling over other modes of transport which have a greater environmental impact. Staff are also required to have a year left on their contract before accessing the scheme and one member of staff on a fixed term contract cited this as the reason they had not taken up the scheme.

The Union does have a policy to prevent domestic air travel. Air travel is occasionally permitted where the destination is international or if it is the only mode of transport available to reach that destination. This has been upheld and no member of staff has used air travel this academic year.

5. Waste

The Union's wide range of operations and activities means that it produces a diverse range of waste streams. A waste audit was carried out in November 2018. The waste audit for the office within the

Union highlighted that General Waste was the greatest waste stream. It also showed contamination of the food waste bin in the kitchen.

Much of the waste in the general (non-recyclable) waste bins is packaging related. Staff have been asked to check with colleagues to ensure multiple orders are not made to the same supplier and to shop locally and in person for smaller, more readily available items. A sign has been placed above the food waste bin illustrating what can and cannot be put in it.

There are recycling bins which are used in the Office, Kitchen and Reception. However, the usage of these has been highlighted as an area for improvement, as highlighted in the Union Sustainability Survey which was undertaken in February 2019, wherein only 57% of staff said they were confident using the waste management system in the office. Throughout the year there have also been issues surrounding the set up of recycling bins as bins were often seemed to be set up incorrectly, with the wrong bag in recycling bins, or one bin bag used for a duo recycling bin. This has been resolved with PAF (Property and Facilities) and there has been a great improvement as of March 2019.

A 20 minute segment of the weekly team meeting for Union staff was also used to instruct staff on the proper use of the waste management system, with clarity given over which items could and could not be recycled.

The Union orders a lot of products online for the shop and its activities. Often these come in plastic packaging and as such produce a lot of waste which cannot always be recycled. To try and reduce this a member of staff has calculated for some items how many to order to ensure all the space is filled to minimise packaging. Also, for items in which the packaging could be reused members of staff make sure they post the packaging back to the supplier to minimise waste.

We have also audited communication and promotional items to make sure that we are not over ordering items and as such producing unnecessary waste.

6. Paper

A paper audit was completed of the Union wherein all items made of paper were identified and their use and amount were analysed. Table 3 highlights the paper items that the Union uses for its activities and operations.

The Union orders approximately 20 reams of unbleached, recycled paper and 5 reams of bleached white paper per semester. This amount has remained stable over the last two years.

Table 3: Paper items used by Student Union members of staff.

	Paper used by Union staff
Communication materials	Posters
	Leaflets
	Table standers
	Pamphlets
	Wall planners
	Business cards
Office	Bleached paper
	Recycled and non-bleached paper

	Post-it notes
	Envelopes
Shop	Receipts

To try and minimise the environmental impact of this recycled paper is used wherever possible for communication material and within the office. It is agreed that within the Union bleached paper is used only for communication activities and that recycled non-bleached paper will be used within the office. It is recognised that this does not always happen, as staff do not always remember to remove the bleached paper and replace it with recycled and non-bleached paper. The Union is also looking into reducing the usage of bleached paper across the University and action has been taken by two members of staff to progress this.

Management of paper usage is done in accordance to the waste hierarchy which sees the following measures put in place.

To prevent paper being used we:

- Encourage staff to think about the environment before printing.
- All members of staff have a line in their email signature asking the recipient to think about the environment before printing the email to minimise paper usage internally and externally.
- Staff use non-bleached paper where appropriate to prevent bleached paper being used unnecessarily.
- Agendas for meetings are sent electronically prior to the meeting so that printed copies do not need to be provided for meetings.
- For the AGM and Student Council, students have to request copies of the agenda and need to have extenuating circumstances in order to be provided with a printed copy.

To reduce the amount of paper we use:

- Default duplex printing.
- Completing an audit of communication materials to highlight where we are over ordering.

To reuse paper we:

- Print posters and bunting without the date on them so that they can be reused each year.
- Laminate posters so that they avoid wear and tear.
- Have implemented a scrap paper box in the office.

To recycle paper we:

- Use the paper recycling bins in the office.

6.1 Communication material

The Union completed an audit of the communication material we had ordered over the course of the 2018-2019 academic year. The results of which are shown in Table 4. After completing an audit of the communication materials, it was seen that for some campaigns communication material had been over ordered, most notably for the 2018-2019 Wall Planner and Welcome Week Guide, neither of which can be reused for following years. Staff have already started making the conscious choice to order communication materials that do not include dates so that it is possible to reuse them in

following years. However, it is recognised that it is not possible to do this for all communication materials. Whenever there is any excess communication materials staff always ensure that they are recycled correctly.

The supplier we use for our printed communications (WFM) only uses paper from sustainable forests, which is mostly uncoated. For every tree that is cut down another is grown in it's place.

All the printers used by the supplier gain 35-40% of their electricity from on-site solar panels. The printing uses vegetable based inks, from ingredients farmed sustainably.

Table 4: results of the communication material audit conducted in April 2019.

Campaign material	Number left over	Reusable
2018/19 Welcome Guide	1,876	No
2018/19 Wall Planner	1,443	No
Study Well Booklet (2018)	51	No
Leadership academy posters	62	Yes
Vote cards	1,803	No
Vote stickers	43 pages	Yes
Beer mates for election nominations	227	No
Election Candidate Manifesto	300	No
Fairtrade Table Talkers	3	Yes
S.H.A.G cards	0	Yes
City Project Fund	908	Yes
Programme Rep Handbook	21	No
Election information pamphlet	13	No

7. Conclusion

The Union recognises that it carries a large environmental impact and is working towards reducing this in the most effective and efficient ways it can. The environmental impacts highlighted, while recognised as the main impacts, are not the only ones the Union is responsible for. Others include: secondary impacts from activities and operations and environmental impacts of the supply chain. Further sustainability progression is planned to continue into the next academic year.