

Single Use Plastics and Disposable Items Policy

Brief Description & Purpose:	Our Single Use Plastic and Disposable Items Policy works to minimise unnecessary plastic on campus. We promote reusable and eco-friendly options to reduce waste and protect the environment. The Policy is overseen by the University Sustainability Management Group. Progress is reported via the Sustainability Annual Report.		
Applicable to (list cohorts):	Staff: All staff	Students: All students	Third Parties: Suppliers
Date Created:	16 June 2021	Last Review Date:	01 June 2026
Approval Authority:	University Sustainability Management Group	Approved:	15 June 2026
Executive Owner:	Prof John Woodward	Business Owner:	Dr Paul Steadman
Next Review Date:	15 June 2028	Publication External Y/N	Yes

1. Introduction

This policy forms part of Northumbria University’s sustainability framework and supports the Environmental Sustainability Policy and Waste Management Policy.

Plastic waste is one of the greatest environmental challenges facing the world today. The UK government estimates that there are more than 150 million tonnes of plastic in the oceans, with around 100,000 sea mammals and one million birds dying each year from ingesting or becoming entangled in plastic waste.

As a signatory to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, the University supports the vision of a circular economy for plastic, in which it never becomes waste or pollution. We are committed to tackling the plastic waste problem by minimising the use of single use plastics and disposable items across our operations and services, and by working with suppliers, service providers, and partners to reduce unnecessary plastic waste across our campuses.

2. Policy Detail

2.1 Definition of Single Use Plastics and Disposable Items

Single use plastics are any disposable plastic items designed for a single use. Examples include plastic bags, disposable utensils, beverage containers, coffee capsules, wet wipes, razor blades, plastic drinks bottles, food wrappers, bottle tops, straws, stirrers and plastic lids.

2.2 Commitments

The University commits to:

- Work with staff and students to eliminate single use plastics and disposable items across campuses.
- Communicate the importance of protecting environments through Goalkeepers and Sustainability Ambassadors, supporting and promoting positive initiatives and city campaigns.
- Collaborate with event organisers to eliminate single use plastics and disposable items from all events held on University land and share guidance more widely.
- Support litter-pick initiatives to keep open spaces free from plastic litter.
- Require all suppliers to minimise single use plastics and disposable items in service provision and adopt sustainable alternatives.
- Where plastics are unavoidable, encourage the use of recycled plastics and support manufacturers using locally sourced waste plastics.
- Work with partners in joint ventures and innovative projects to reduce single use plastic waste.
- Share best practice and plastic-free initiatives with staff, students, visitors, and suppliers through University communication channels.

These commitments are embedded into:

- Sustainable Events Guidance
- Sustainable Procurement Policy
- Sustainable Food Policy

2.3 Ongoing Reduction Strategies

The University has adopted the following strategies to reduce disposable items and single use plastics:

- Promoting reusable coffee cups by offering discounts on drinks purchased with them.
- Providing water fountains across campus to encourage bottle refills (locations listed on the UK Refill App).
- Reducing plastic packaging and cutlery in catering outlets where feasible and hygienic.
- Serving drinks without plastic straws.
- Replacing plastic stirrers with wooden stirrers.
- Promoting correct disposal where single use plastics are unavoidable, with mixed recycling bins located in all office, teaching, and communal spaces.
- Educating staff and students on correct disposal methods (items must be clean and dry before being placed in mixed recycling).

3. Key Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
University Sustainability Management Group	Policy oversight, review, and approval
Commercial Operations (Finance)	Embedding commitments in events, procurement and campus operations
Chartwells and Other Service Providers	Implementation of plastic reduction measures in catering and retail operations
Event Organisers	Ensuring events held on University land are free from single use plastics
Staff, Students, Visitors	Supporting plastic reduction through choices, correct disposal and participation in initiatives

4. Related Policies, Procedures and Other Resources

- Environmental Sustainability Policy
- Waste Management Policy
- Sustainable Procurement Policy
- UK Refill App (water fountain locations)

5. Document Control

Version No.	Reviewer	Date	Changes
1.0		16.06.21	Created
1.1	Dr Paul Steadman	20.06.24	Strategy update
1.2	Dr Paul Steadman	24.06.25	Targets, policy format
1.3	Dr Paul Steadman	01.06.26	Strategy update