

The views provided reflect our thinking at a point in time. Sustainability is a journey, and we keep adapting our approach to be as effective as possible, based on the latest research and in dialogue with the LSE community.

What is LSE doing to reduce single use plastics?

A global problem

Single-use plastics are convenient but come with a heavy environmental cost. Plastics are direct products from the fossil fuel industry, a major contributor to climate change, and their usage has been increasing drastically in recent years ([How much plastic waste do we produce?](#)). Plastics are durable items which do not biodegrade, meaning that plastics that are not recycled become long lived pollution.

Plastics have many positive uses, such as in healthcare settings and the food industry to prevent food waste, but their end-of-life is problematic in many cases. Reusable alternatives such as buying food or cleaning materials in large containers that use less plastic save costs but mean spending more upfront. Reusables can require more time (eg washing) which often disproportionately falls on women.

All of us have small choices we can make to reduce our plastic use and wider actions such as lobbying your favourite brands to make changes.

Plastic at LSE

In 2017/18 we carried out a detailed waste audit to understand what plastics users were throwing away. The most frequent waste plastic items found at LSE were:

- Hot drinks cups
- Disposable cutlery
- Sweet and confectionary wrappers
- Water and drinks bottles
- Plastic food packaging (like takeaway containers/ sandwich wrappers)

We also identified that these items were just as likely to be found in the general waste bins as the recycling ones, highlighting confusion in users about the recyclability of plastics. This informed our 2019-21 Waste Action Plan. Additionally, we recover large volumes of clothing from halls of residence every year. A significant proportion of which are made out of plastic fibres (eg polyester).

Our Initiatives

- Responding to a rise in global and local awareness about plastic pollution, LSE launched its [Plastic Free LSE campaign](#) in 2018 to identify single use plastics at LSE and engage the school on reducing their use. The campaign successfully engaged with more than 750 students and staff, who jointly delivered 25 Green Impact projects reducing single-use plastics.
- LSE catering outlets apply charges on water bottles (10p) and single-use paper cups (25p) to drive behaviour change. Already 40% of hot drinks served at LSE are in reusable cups.
- Separate coffee cup recycling bins on campus were introduced at the start of 2020. The orange bins are located at every café on campus.
- Free the Flush project raised awareness of the issue of plastics items being flushed down toilets and plastic-free hygiene products, with posters now in place in most LSE toilets.

What you can do to reduce plastic waste at LSE

- Apply the *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle* principles.
- Don't forget your reusable cup for hot drinks at LSE catering outlets.
- Avoid bottled water and carry a water bottle to refill at our water fountains.
- Be mindful of unnecessary packaging when buying items.

Plastics and the COVID-19 pandemic

- We have adopted the use of reusable masks, biodegradable wipes and fixed refillable alcohol dispensers. Student's welcome packs included bamboo reusable masks.
- More information here "[Your PPE and Sustainability](#)".

Further resources

- [LSE's Waste & Resources webpage](#)
- [Plastic Free LSE campaign – Impact report \(2019\)](#)
- [LSE Catering environmental initiatives](#)
- WRAP report "[Understanding plastic packaging and the language we use to describe it](#)".