



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Sustainability Team,
Estates Division

PLASTIC FREE LSE

Impact Report

Minimising single-use plastic
at LSE

Contents

Chapter 1: An Overview

- 1.1 Background
- 1.2 Internal waste audit

Chapter 2: The Initiatives

- 2.1 Green Impact
- 2.2 Reduce the Juice
- 2.3 LSE Green Week
 - Day of waste
 - #OneLess water fountain
 - Instagram posts
- 2.4 Sustainable Futures Society projects
- 2.5 Alumni-led plastic construction waste reuse project

Chapter 3: Conclusion

An Overview

Plastic Free LSE was launched in July 2018 by LSE Director Minouch Shafik. The campaign had four aims:

1. **Support staff and student-led initiatives and projects to enable individual action and learning.**
2. **Encourage individuals to reduce usage of single-use plastics and show easy, more sustainable alternatives.**
3. **Create discussion and raise awareness about the complexity of plastics.**
4. **Reduce the number of disposable coffee cups sold, single-use water bottles bought and plastic disposable cutlery and water cups used around LSE.**

1.1 Background

The Plastic Free LSE campaign emerged amidst global concern about plastic pollution which was shared by LSE students and staff.

David Attenborough's Blue Planet BBC documentary in 2017, brought shocking images to our living rooms, demonstrating the damage that plastic is having on the world's marine wildlife and ecosystems. The [New Plastic Economy Report](#) highlighted that a business-as-usual scenario would lead to more plastics than fish (by weight) in the ocean by 2050¹. Articles highlighted on a weekly basis that plastics were appearing in all elements of our lives, from clothing to fish and human faeces.

Individuals, businesses and government began to take action on the issue. LSE and LSESU catering outlets, along with high street restaurants, bars and cafés replaced plastic drinking straws with paper ones and there was a clear desire for a move towards reducing plastic consumption and being part of a solution.

In July 2018, LSE Director Minouche Shafik was

nominated on Twitter by Andy Haldane, Chief Economist of Bank of England, to take part in the #PlasticsChallenge. On [Twitter she pledged](#) to reduce plastics by using her LSE Keep Cup, banning plastic cups in all of her meetings and committing the School to the Plastic Free LSE campaign.

1.2 Internal Waste Audit

In June 2018, the LSE Sustainability Team donned gloves and white overalls to audit 23 LSE bins - 12 recycling and 11 general waste - from four different locations on different days and at different times.

The aim of the audit was to understand the main single-use plastics being used around campus which the campaign could target.

Some of the main findings of the audit were:

- Highest quantity found in bins: disposable plastic cutlery.
- Second-highest quantity found in bins: disposable coffee cups.
- Third-highest quantity found in bins: confectionary wrappers such as crisps and sweet wrappers.
- Most recycling bins were contaminated with food and liquid residue.
- Disposable plastic cutlery and confectionary wrappers were the most common contaminating *product* in the recycling bins.
- More flavoured drinks bottles were disposed of than water bottles and most were put in the correct bin (recycling bin).

As a result of the audit, it was decided that the campaign should target the products that were a) most commonly found in the bins and b) had simple and effective reusable alternatives. Hence, the campaign targeted disposable cutlery, coffee cups, water bottles and water cups.

As a result of the contamination findings, the campaign also aimed to raise awareness about LSE's waste streams and the importance of keeping food and liquid out of the recycling bins.

¹ The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics' by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and

The Initiatives

2.1 Green Impact

In 2019, Green Impact, ran by NUS, celebrated its 10th year having engaged 2,792 LSE staff in sustainability! Each year, staff teams, supported by trained students, implement actions and design creative projects to enhance sustainability in their work place, receiving awards for their work at LSE's annual Celebration of Sustainability.

The programme was used to provide a practical framework to implement Plastic Free LSE and achieve impact across diverse areas of the School.

Teams from student halls of residences, divisions, departments and LSE research centres all participated.



Green Impact actions:

25 teams reduced single-use plastic by:

- Auditing their bins
- Swapping disposable water cups and bottles, hot drinks cups and cutlery for reusables ones in their offices or communal areas*
- Providing refillable water jugs at meetings and events instead of bottled water*
- Organising a Waste and Plastic Workshop, delivered by the Sustainability Team*
- Promoting reusable coffee cups, water bottles, cutlery and LSE drinking fountains to LSE students and staff through various means

*some teams were unable to swap to reusable due to challenges in infrastructure or facilities.

°232 staff and students participated in a series of interactive 'Waste and Plastics Workshop's', delivered by the Sustainability Team. Participants learnt about the waste industry, findings from the internal waste audit, waste streams at LSE, the issue of plastic pollution and could take an optional plastic pledge.

53 participants pledged to cut their single-use plastic usage through specific actions including: using a reusable mug, sourcing refillable shampoo and conditioner, bringing food in to work, using a metal straw and educating family and friends on the topic.

PLASTIC FREE LSE PLEDGES

Over 50 LSE staff pledged to reduce their single-use plastic. Here's some of them!

Waste & Plastics Workshops were delivered to over 209 LSE staff.

Plastic Free LSE is about cutting single-use plastic. Let's voluntarily choose reusable or responsibly use less (and it helps!). Let's make it new things at a time.

Over the next 6 weeks, I pledge to...

What could you reduce?

The pledges were part of the interactive Green Impact Waste & Plastics Workshop learning about:

- the waste industry
- waste and recycling at LSE
- hidden plastics and why not all plastic is evil
- reducing our consumption of single-use plastics

Green Impact Projects

20 of the teams designed 16 interesting and diverse projects relating to single-use plastics, you can read about them in [full here](#).

The impact of these projects:

- **Almost 50,000 disposable cups were avoided** and **sales in a reusable cup increased to 18%** at LSE Catering outlets (September to January, inclusive). This was a result of a 10p charge on disposable cups and 25p discount on reusable.
- **800g of recyclable plastic** were collected from the River Thames by 20 LSE staff and students
- **630 plastic bin bags a month were saved** by Butler's Wharf hall of residence who reduced the frequency at which the bins were changed, a student-initiated idea. This resulted in a saving of 7560 bags each year.
- **440,000 sheets of paper plus 40,000 pastic wallets each academic year have been saved** due to switching from paper to digital graduate applications in the Graduate Admissions Office.
- **Over 400 LSE Keep Cups** were given to students age 16-18 on the LSE student shadowing programme, encouraging them to avoid using disposable coffee cups.
- **40 discounted orders of plastic-free alternative products** were made by LSE students and staff from The Weekly Shop, a plastic free shop founded by LSE alum, Diana Szpotowicz.
- **Over 750 LSE students and staff were directly engaged** with as a result of the projects, and many more passively engaged through observation in-person or digitally.



Images of Green Impact. Finance, HR and EDI team (top); Department of Management (middle); teams celebrating at Celebration of Sustainability (bottom).

2.2 Reduce the Juice

Reduce the Juice engages students in LSE halls of residence to reduce consumption of energy, water and waste.



The waste sprint in March 2019 focused on plastics, in support of the Plastic Free LSE campaign.

During a week, over 249 students across 8 LSE halls engaged in discussion and action to minimize single-use plastic in their daily lives. Carr Saunders hall won by sharing the most pictures on social media of individuals avoiding plastic waste. This really raised awareness of plastic and how to reduce its usage and impacts.

2.3 LSE Green Week

Every year, LSE's Green Week engages staff, students and the general public in a range of sustainability issues through interactive and diverse initiatives.

A **day of waste** from the LSE Library was displayed outside the Library and the Sustainability Team engaged passer-bys in the issue of how much waste we dispose of every day.

Waste management company, Veolia, engaged students on **how to recycle correctly** at LSE using incentivized sorting games.

New #OneLess water fountain installed saves 8,000 plastic bottles in first 5 months

During Green week, LSE unveiled a new water fountain on Sheffield Street, outside the Students' Union. The fountain is one of 28 drinking fountains provided by the Mayor of London, [#OneLess](#) and MIW Water Cooler Experts as part of the London Drinking Fountain Fund. The network of drinking fountains is making it easier for Londoners to stop using plastic water bottles and protect the ocean from plastic pollution.

LSE's Chief Operating Officer, Andrew Young, unveiled the fountain to gathered students and staff and representatives from OneLess and City Hall.

In the first 5 months, the fountain has provided 3,948m³ of water to users. That's equivalent to an incredible **8,000 500ml plastic bottles!**

Instagram posts reach over 10,000 viewers

25 stories relating to Plastic Free LSE were posted on the LSE Instagram account during LSE's Green Week. The posts encouraged viewers to use reusable cups and water bottles, recycle and live sustainably.

The posts were viewed 7,700 times on average by Instagram users and some of the posts reached over 10,000 views, ranking among the top LSE Instagram Stories content in terms of views and engagement to that date!



Images of Green Week. Day of waste (top); opening of the new LSE water fountain by LSE Chief Operating Officer, Andrew Young (bottom).

2.4 Sustainable Futures Society

The LSE Sustainable Futures Society is a student society which collaborates with the Estates Division to oversee the allocation of the Sustainable Projects Fund to staff and student-led projects which enhance sustainability at LSE. The Sustainable Projects Fund accumulates money from a 10p tax charged against disposable bottled water sold at LSE Catering outlets.

In 2018-19, four of the eleven funded projects related directly to plastic pollution. The following are currently being undertaken:

- Seven students from the LSESU Marine Society will research marine plastic pollution and biodiversity off the coast of Scotland on a sailing expedition with Sail Britain. The Society will share their findings and thoughts on policy solutions through a report and photography exhibition.
- Students arriving at LSE often receive disposable plastic items in their welcome kits. This project, Reuse Kits, will see new students in Rosebery Hall receive ethically sourced items which encourage sustainable behaviours, including using a reusable water bottle, coffee cup and cutlery.
- The LS-Sea project tackles the issue of plastic pollution by highlighting to the LSE community the impact of flushing incorrect items down the toilet on both marine environment and facilities maintenance.
- The Keep Cup project [headed up by LSE Central Catering](#) will subsidise the price of LSE Keep Cups, encouraging new students to purchase one and adopt sustainable behaviours.
- A student Masters dissertation is investigating behavior change and nudge theory in relation to single-use plastics. The student will explore themes of peer pressure and shame in using plastic publicly and the relationship between the impact of plastic straws and media attention they gathered.



Images: Sustainable Futures Society committee members (top); LSE Marine Society research marine plastic pollution with Sail Britain (middle & bottom).

2.5 Alumni-led plastic construction waste reuse project

An innovative, circular economy project was initiated by two LSE alumni, Juan Pablo Corral and Lucas Fuhrmann, founders of a start-up called INTERVAL Strategies which makes new products from materials that are usually wasted.

INTERVAL Strategies discovered that plastic scaffolding wrap almost always goes to waste after a single use, and is rarely recycled.

The project created reusable tote bags from the plastic construction wrap used on the Centre Building Redevelopment project. This avoided approximately $175\text{g/m}^2 \times 240\text{m}^2$, 42kg of scaffolding wrap from being disposed of.

The bags were developed in partnership with a local tailor, as well as the LSE Capital Development Team and construction contractors Mace. This proof of concept will support INTERVAL to further develop their circular economy business model, following on from Lucas' earlier success as a Mayor's Entrepreneur finalist with his clothing made from processed banana tree pulp.



Images: Plastic construction wrap in situ (right); as tote bags

2 Conclusion

Plastic Free LSE was year-long campaign, launched by LSE Director Minouche Shafiq in July 2018, which aimed to:

1. Support staff and student-led initiatives and projects to enable individual action and learning.
2. Encourage individuals to reduce usage of single-use plastics and show easy, more sustainable alternatives.
3. Create discussion and raise awareness about the complexity of plastics.
4. Reduce the number of disposable coffee cups sold, single-use water bottles bought and plastic disposable cutlery and water cups used around LSE.

The campaign met the aims through the variety of initiatives that were delivered, demonstrated in this Impact Report.

The variety of initiatives delivered was a particular strength of the campaign as it engaged a wide audience including: LSE staff, LSE students in halls and on campus, prospective LSE students, LSE alumni, individuals following LSE on social media, external organisations, businesses and local government.

In addition, the range of initiatives enabled varying levels and types of engagement from individuals choosing to deliver their own projects to passers-by observing a day of waste or using the new water fountain to Instagram users engaging remotely and digitally.

The internal waste audit undertaken at the start of the year was important to set the campaign targets and record waste rates prior to the campaign. Another waste audit is planned for late 2019, once LSE's new waste contractor is mobilized and settled. However, comparing the results of the waste audits will not be completely accurate due to the different times of year and different footfall rates on campus. Ideally, the waste audit would be done at the same time the following year though due to staff resources this was not possible.

In conclusion, Plastic Free LSE was a successful campaign in raising awareness about plastic pollution and minimising single-use plastic usage at LSE. Whilst the campaign was a year long initiative, since 2006 LSE has been using the waste hierarchy to reduce waste and will continue to do so, including that of single-use plastics.

The year-long campaign has highlighted the appetite, drive and commitment of the LSE community in being part of the plastic pollution solution and it has been delightful to see. Through individually reducing our waste and single-use plastics we can, collectively, have a great impact.

We are grateful and proud of the enthusiasm at which the LSE community engaged with the campaign and hopeful for the future which will continue to embed sustainability and reduce consumption of single-use plastics.



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