

# DREAMING OF A LEANER, GREENER CHRISTMAS

As the festive season approaches, those of us working in the education sector are looking forward to a well-earned break! But with the need to embed sustainability into every aspect of our lives greater than ever, the final weeks of term offer tertiary education practitioners an unmissable opportunity to educate students and staff about issues such as waste and energy management – aspects of sustainability especially relevant at Christmas, as the nation decks the halls with boughs of holly and fills bins with food waste, cards, wrapping paper and packaging!

In this article, the **Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC)** gives you a few things to think about during this time of celebration and excess.

## Thought into action

The challenge is how to engage students and staff with the principle of **less is more** for a season synonymous with excess. And having captured their interest, how to turn that into action and ensure they take the message home and translate it into long-term behaviour change.

The first step in solving an issue is **knowledge**, so make sure your staff and students are well informed about the waste problems in the UK and the world. This will help them understand how their actions fit into the wider picture. There are some great sources of information online to help you illustrate the problem, including

statistics on Christmas consumption and waste at WRAP ([www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)).

## Thought for food

Make sure you **link individual behaviour to the bigger issues**. For example, the UK wastes approximately one-fifth of all food bought by domestic households. This figure increases by a staggering **80 per cent** over the festive season. Food waste not only costs the household and adds to the UK's landfill, but also contributes to global food shortages as the planet tries to feed a population of seven billion on a finite amount of agricultural land.

Having educated your staff and students about the issues surrounding waste, your next step is **motivation**. Inspire them to make changes as an individual to become part of the solution, not the problem. Having explored the problems our increasing waste production is creating, discuss ways that your students can make a difference this

Christmas. The internet is full of great ideas for cutting waste: think e-cards, recycled wrapping paper, handmade gifts, locally sourced food with minimal packaging, delicious dinners made with leftovers. Challenge your students to identify creative ways they could cut their waste over the holidays. Why not suggest a sustainable-themed New Year's resolution? Instead of pledging to lose weight this year, let's all pledge to lose waste! And make it stick for more than just January.

Having galvanised

your staff and students into action, make sure you **capture the results**. Ask your students to make a photo diary of their waste reduction activities. Use an online action tracker such as [www.wearewhatwedo.org](http://www.wearewhatwedo.org) to monitor actions. Arrange a collection of Christmas cards at your institution in the New Year.

## Turn off!

As many institutions close down over the festive period it is an excellent time to save energy, so make sure staff and students turn off their lights and equipment. Work with your IT departments to help put reminders on each PC.

Finally, encourage your students to **spread the word**. Empower them to question wasteful behaviour wherever they see it and use pester power to generate real change in their own homes and the wider community. After all, they have a vested interest in helping to protect our dwindling natural resources and have the energy and enthusiasm to push for the real change we need.

## Get inspired



**The EAUC is the sustainability champion for universities and colleges in the UK. Run by members, for its members, the EAUC seeks to drive sustainability to the heart of further and higher education. We deliver member services and resources that continually add value and offer exclusive access to information, ideas and news from many of the projects we're involved in. Find out more at [www.eauc.org.uk](http://www.eauc.org.uk).**

