

# Communicating sustainably

## Guidance for taking sustainability into account in your comms, marketing and messaging

Making communications sustainable can be subtle; it doesn't have to be front and centre, but instead can sometimes just be simple, indirect messaging. Communicating sustainably is about taking a moment to consider if there can be any changes or adaptations that help to *show* how sustainability is embedded at Essex. There are of course times when we want to *tell* people how sustainability is embedded, so it is useful to think about what the best message is for any given piece of information. Below are five useful tips to guide your thinking when developing your communications, marketing or messaging plans:

### Imagery

Think about the opportunities to portray sustainability through images. Not just about parkland vistas on campus, but also any items in the image. This helps to demonstrate sustainable action in simple ways and helps to remind us of actions that we can all take that add up to make a difference:

- ✓ Reusable takeaway drinks cups (Essex Food have a range of these, or they can just be generic/unbranded)
- ✓ Refillable water bottles / jugs / cups
- ✓ Use of public transport / walking / cycling
  
- ✗ Single use coffee cups and lids
- ✗ Plastic water bottles / cups
- ✗ People driving / encouraging driving alone / short trips

### What's the angle?

Similar to imagery, visibility in terms of how we talk about our events, achievements, activities and news can often incorporate a sustainability angle, even if a very light touch; a story does not have to be solely about sustainability. Show people how sustainability is being embedded – don't just tell them that it is.

For example:

- If you have a new piece of equipment, is it energy efficient, does it have features such as recyclability or reusability?
- Can you encourage people to bring a cup or bottle to an event?
- Can you flag that catering will be vegetarian/plant-based only?

- Will there be a talk linked to sustainability themes, or does it relate to a wider event with sustainability links?
- Does a piece of research have environmental benefits, even if it's a (positive!) side effect?
- Will a project result in a reduced use of resources, either immediately or over time?

## **Physical vs. digital**

A very simple but important consideration is around whether information can be digital only. If it can, it means you don't need to worry about resources being printed or manufactured.

If you do need physical items, that's OK; sometimes it's essential. When that is the case, consider whether they can be long-lasting or reusable. For example, avoid putting dates on posters or banners that would age them. This will save money in the long-term too, as you won't need to reprint materials again for a while.

Also consider the materials used in manufacture; does the paper come from recycled or renewable sources? Where do products come from (ie are they made locally or further afield?). Will they be recyclable at the end of their useful life? Are they long-lasting and durable?

## **Embrace the QR code**

Sometimes combining the physical and the digital means you can quickly share information without having to fill posters etc with text. Keep it simple and generate a QR code that will link to the webpage where people can find more information.

Remember though that if information is available online, anyone using their smartphone to read it won't be able to scan their QR code from their device – so make sure that there's a link available for them to click too.

## **Know your audience**

Be sure to consider the audience you are talking to. While some people's knowledge of climate change, environmental challenges and sustainability may be limited, others will have more expertise. Whenever possible, tailor your message to match the audience you want to reach, using the most appropriate channel to do so.

## **And finally, two pieces of advice:**

- Nothing is perfect! It is better to be doing 100 things imperfectly than 1 thing perfectly when it comes to sustainability. It is very difficult in our real, flawed world to get everything right on sustainability; start with simple steps and you can build up your knowledge and ideas.
- Ask for help – the Sustainability Team can support and guide if you have queries. They will always be glad to help if there is something you are unsure on. Just email [sustainability@essex.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@essex.ac.uk) to ask a question.