

A MESSAGE FROM NICK BRAITHWAITE



Dear Colleagues,

The countdown to COP26 (the 26th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) is well and truly underway. We are now just over 11 weeks away from COP26 taking place in Glasgow.



OU observer status at the COP26 - could you be our observer?

The OU has its own 'observer' status, which means that we can nominate some individuals to attend the COP26. We expect to be allocated 0-2 places. All face-to-face activity is subject to Covid-safe mitigation and Government guidelines. Observers are admitted into the main part of the negotiations yet do not have the same status as a government negotiator. In the past, colleagues have shared their experience of attending more widely in communications or teaching materials. More information about NGO status and participation in the negotiations can be found [here](#), OU is part of the Research and Independent NGO group (RINGO)

If this is something you would like to put yourself forward for, then please [fill in this form](#) by midnight on 22 August.

If selected to attend on behalf of the OU, the usual travel, accommodation, risk assessment and subsistence reimbursements will apply.

To get an idea of what COP26 might be like (Covid-safe mitigation allowing), please take a look at this [COP21 \(2015\) interactive map on OpenLearn](#).

IPCC Code RED

Earlier this week, the IPCC released its 'code red' report calling for everyone to step up efforts and act decisively to halt fossil fuel use, shifting fossil fuel subsidies to renewables – also reflected in your energy choices; and to preserve biodiversity – your local trees, hedgerows, meadows, verges, gardens and wildlife and increasing plant-based sources in your diet. The scientific authors urged everyone to take every action possible as it will all make a difference.

Our current 1.2 degree and rising global atmospheric temperature has meant global heatwaves, drought and wildfires, heavy rainfall, flooding and extreme winds, disproportionately affecting the poorest and most vulnerable across the globe. Yet we have clear solutions available which

reduce financial climate risk and must be scaled at pace leading to clean air, better health and inclusive green economies - who would not want that?

Sometimes, the harsh scientific facts of our current lifestyle can feel too overwhelming for action. Sometimes, it can feel like only Governments and big business have the power to take radical and rapid action, however many decision-makers in these organisations have a university education and their decisions are informed by or would benefit from university research. Universities play a civic role in innovating for solutions for a climate-safe future and raising awareness of the long-term impacts of our actions. At the OU, we must all do our bit to radically re-examine our daily choices and actions and ensure they are climate-safe, as well as influence Government and business to act boldly.

I encourage you to read the first part of the Sixth Assessment Report, [Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis](#) and to share your solutions and ideas for action with us.

Sustainability at OU - update

As we look forward to the new academic year, I want to share a quick update on sustainability which is now one of the five objectives of the OU Strategy. We shall be recruiting a couple of new roles to help me draw up and deliver on an institutional action plan, amplify and coordinate the excellent work underway across the institution and provide support to boost sustainability across our core business.

As well as doing our bit to reduce the carbon emissions and environmental impact of the OU as quickly as possible, we aim to focus on how we can enable everyone in the OU family to be bold, to use their unique skills and apply our collective resources and influence to create solutions to the climate crisis. This is not continuing business as usual (BAU) with incremental changes, we want to continuously and courageously leap into a sustainable future which we might not yet be able to imagine. I draw on the 52+ year heritage of the OU in that respect. When the OU was created as the University of the Air – that was airmail and airwaves via our BBC co-production partner - little could we have imagined then how that has extended to wireless-free, instant messaging and global online delivery. In the same way those early OU visionaries laid the ground for the OU as we know it today, we must be radical and bold and lay the ground for a liveable climate in the future.

COP26 Universities Network and British Academy

We continue to encourage colleagues to join the [COP26 Universities Network](#) and participate in this collaborative network; please do also let us know of other platforms where you are sharing your views on solutions to the climate crisis. Satheesh Krishnamurthy, Professor of Energy Technology, recently took part in a British Academy COP26 round table on Cities and Energy Transitions and we look forward to hearing about how other colleagues are sharing their expertise. You can get in touch via sustainability@open.ac.uk

How the OU is supporting the SDGs - Open Account

In the 17 weeks running up to COP, we have been sharing some of the information we have gathered from the Open Account about OU work that pertains to the [17 UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). On OU Life, we have covered:

- [SDG3: Good Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [SDG4: Quality Education](#)
- [SDG9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure](#)
- [SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#)
- [SDG13: Climate Action](#)
- [SDG15: Life on Land](#)

If you want to share your work with us (research, project, initiative, professional practice or other) please complete the [Open Account e-form](#) and provide a 100-word 'elevator pitch' and let us know which SDGs it relates to.

BBC call

In other news, our co-production partner, the BBC, is on the lookout for [young climate reporters](#). The 22 successful individuals will be on hand to provide support and guidance with the production of original stories about sustainability and climate change. Entrants must be aged 18 to 24, so, if you know someone who might be interested, please do share this opportunity with them.

With continued optimism that we can act now for climate safety,

Nick

Prof. Nick Braithwaite

Executive Dean, STEM Faculty and VCE Sponsor for Sustainability

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