

A MESSAGE FROM NICK BRAITHWAITE



Dear colleagues,

We are now well and truly in the midst of unit planning. This year is the first that sustainability forms part of the University Strategy and I have no doubt this will be reflected in unit plans across the OU. I've been encouraging us all to embed sustainability into our current roles and future plans. Some of our academic colleagues have been bringing their expertise in areas as diverse as engineering, gaming, and teaching to conversations on sustainability in careers. The result is a series of [brand-new videos](#) encouraging us all to reimagine our jobs for sustainability. These assets build on The Regenerators co-production and were launched for National Careers Week (7-12 March). They demonstrate how we can all bring our experience and expertise to action for sustainability.



I am delighted to invite Emily Towers, newly appointed Deputy Director of Communications, to share perspectives from her previous experience leading communications on climate change. Emily brings a wealth of knowledge and passion to the OU and will be working with colleagues in Marketing and Communications to ensure sustainability is embedded into their unit plans.

Nick

Prof. Nick Braithwaite

Executive Dean, STEM Faculty and VCE Sponsor for Sustainability



Over to Emily...

For a decade or so, I worked at the interface between politics, policy, economics, and climate science in Westminster, using communications to raise awareness of, and inspire action on climate change. In 2006, Lord Nicholas Stern (at the London School of Economics and Political Science) had just published *'The Economics of Climate Change'*. Stern had been commissioned by Gordon Brown (then Chancellor)

to set out an economic case for tackling climate change, in large part to convince those in the Treasury and the City to take it seriously. This text had a major impact, along with Tony Juniper's [Friends of the Earth](#) campaign which led to the UK developing the world's first Climate Change Act in 2008, which paved the way for Net Zero commitments across the world.

That same year, I applied to a (rather dry sounding) role managing communications for the UK [Climate Change Committee](#) (CCC). When I got to the interview and met David Kennedy, who had been asked to set up the Committee, I realised this was going to be the start of something special. David and Lord Adair Turner (the first Chair of the Committee) had been commissioned by Government to do something nobody else had done – advise the Government in designing and setting the world's first carbon budgets. These placed a ceiling on the amount of carbon that could be emitted in five-year periods, taking in emissions from across all sectors of the economy.

We sat down with a blank piece of paper to map out how we wanted to position the CCC. We had to be credible, authoritative and seen to be independent. Part of my role was to understand the analysis, turn it into plain English and pitch this out to a broad network of media and stakeholders, to ensure they endorsed our work. This helped to put pressure on Government to accept our recommendations. For the most part, we succeeded. All the carbon budgets we recommended were enacted into law, including controversial targets on aviation. Whilst the UK is on track to meet its first three carbon budgets ending this year, we are not yet on track for future budgets.

I left the CCC to be Chief Press Officer at the Department of Energy and Climate Change. It was an exciting time to be working on climate in Whitehall with a Coalition Government and Liberal Democrat Secretary of State in Sir Ed Davey. Climate change and energy security were at the top of the agenda, but everybody seemed to be backing a particular energy type as a 'silver bullet' and the debate was very partisan. The right-wing press hated onshore wind farms and were still challenging the science around climate change. I spent a lot of my time running between the offices of opposing special advisors – from the liberal and conservative sides – to battle out changes to our messaging.

More recently, I led the strategic communications and campaigns team at [COP26](#). The COP26 Unit was set up as part of the Cabinet Office to lead the UK's Presidency of the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. My role was to lead the team in developing a strategy for UK and international campaigns that would set the world on a path to Net Zero emissions and achieve real-world action in four key areas: coal, cars, cash, trees (as you will have heard about from the OU's COP26 observers). Although the final agreement did not contain everything we had hoped for, the team managed to successfully handle the narrative for the Summit and generate commitments from countries and companies to support Net Zero, including the OU.

The energy price hikes we're seeing now due to the rising cost of wholesale gas, along with the War in Ukraine, are inextricably linked and understandably the focus of mainstream media. However, the passion and ongoing dedication of people working to tackle climate change and transition to a low carbon renewable energy economy are

truly inspiring. The Open University can play a significant role in this. With the reach we have, we can inspire more young people to take up careers in sustainability, upskill and retrain those in employment and encourage action for sustainability amongst our staff, alumni, suppliers, and wider audiences. I look forward to showcasing our incredible research and teaching to contribute solutions to the societal challenges we currently face. I feel very privileged to be at the OU and to be working with Prof. Nick Braithwaite and the team in supporting this mission.

Emily Towers

Deputy Director of Communications, Marketing and Communications

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