

Catering Packaging and Waste Audit

November 2025

Contents

Overview	3
Glossary of terms	3
Key to Relevant Documents.....	3
Methodology	4
Findings	5
Recycling Performance.....	5
Internal Bins	5
Staff Only Areas/Back of House Bins.....	5
Packaging Materials.....	6
Recycle & Behaviour Items	7
Composting Opportunities	8
Summary and Next Steps	9
What this Means for Staff and Students	9

Overview

This Catering Packaging and Waste Audit was carried out by Biffa in November 2025 to review packaging use, recycling performance, and waste management practices within Edge Hill University’s in-house catering operations. The audit provides an evidence-based snapshot of current practices and identifies practical opportunities to reduce waste, improve recycling, and support the University’s sustainability commitments.

Overall, the audit found many examples of good practice already in place, particularly in staff only areas where recycling is generally well managed. However, it also identified recurring challenges, including inconsistent bin signage, contamination of recycling streams, and the use of packaging that cannot currently be recycled or composted through on-site facilities.

The audit highlights several short-term improvements that could be implemented quickly, such as clearer and more consistent recycling signage, improved staff guidance, and small behaviour changes to reduce unnecessary single-use items. Medium- and longer-term opportunities include greater consistency in packaging choices across catering vendors, reviewing the use of compostable materials where appropriate facilities are not available, and exploring alternative solutions that better align with existing recycling infrastructure.

This audit establishes a baseline for future progress. Its findings will help inform decision-making, prioritise actions, and support ongoing collaboration between Edge Hill University and Biffa to reduce environmental impacts and improve the sustainability of catering services across campus.

Glossary of terms

DMR	Dry Mixed Recycling
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
CO ₂ e	Equivalent Carbon Dioxide emissions

Key to Relevant Documents

- Institutional Sustainability Strategy
- Institutional Sustainability Delivery Plan
- Sustainable Food Policy
- Waste and Resource Strategy

Methodology

The audit was carried out by Biffa, working alongside key Edge Hill University staff. It included an on-site walkthrough of catering and waste areas, with observations recorded through notes and photographs.

Following the site visit, Biffa identified potential improvement actions, grouped into short-, medium- and long-term opportunities. This audit is intended as a starting point, with scope for follow-up discussions and future reviews.

Actions have also been categorised based on KPIs set out by EHU as outlined:

Reduce	Reduce total waste per capita to 30% of 2022/23 level by 2030
Cut	Cut CO ₂ e emissions from waste by 30% by 2030
Recycle	Increase recycling rates
Single Use Plastics	Investigate divestment from single-use plastics and non-biodegradable disposables

Short term win	6 months or less
Medium term win	6-12 months
Long term win	12 months +

Findings

Recycling Performance

Internal Bins

Observation: **Short term win**

Internal bins (1, 2, 3 and 4) are located close together but use inconsistent signage and are not always clearly visible as a set. This can lead to confusion and contamination.

Recommended Action:

Standardise messaging across all bins to provide consistent, clear guidance throughout the site.

Staff Only Areas/Back of House Bins

Observation: **Short term win**

One DMR bin (5) contained a black bag (general waste) and mushroom crate (bulky waste), both acting as contaminants.

Recommended Action:

Reinforce correct segregation and provide clear labelling/back-of-house guidance to prevent contamination. Short-term win.

Observation: **Short term win**

Bin 6 – great example of correct DMR use.

Recommended Action:

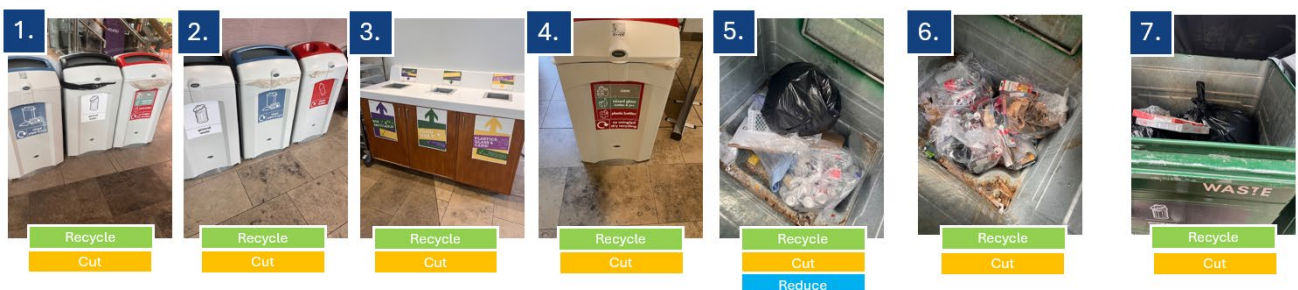
Use this as a reference point for other areas.

Observation: **Medium term win**

Recyclable cardboard trays placed in general waste. The trays can be separated from the surrounding plastic, which should go into general waste.

Recommended Action:

Educate staff on separating materials; from March 2026, flexible plastic collections will allow for even more streamlined recycling of these items.



Packaging Materials

Observation (1):

Medium term win

Disposable coffee cup styles vary by vendor, causing material inconsistencies and contamination. Cups should not go in DMR due to mixed materials affecting sorting, and contamination such as tea bags, rubbish and banana skins/apple cores.

Recommended Action:

- Encourage all vendors to use the same type of coffee cup.
- Engage with vendors about sustainable alternatives.
- Promote the University's reusable cup scheme and track usage to reduce disposables.

Observation (2):

Short term win

Paper lunch bags are acceptable in DMR if clean and non-greaseproof.

Recommended Action:

- Continue placing acceptable bags in DMR.
- Provide guidance or signage for staff/students regarding clean recyclables.

Observation (3):

Short term win

Bulky plastics are currently well-managed, likely collected by suppliers.

Recommended Action:

- Maintain current collection practices.
- Monitor for changes in supplier collections; explore alternatives if needed.

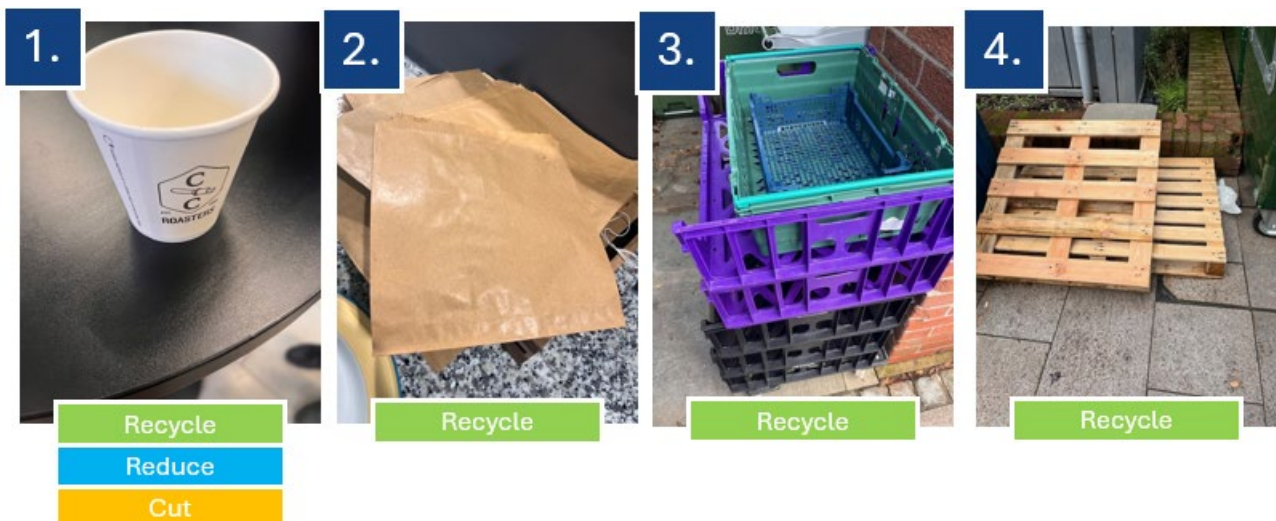
Observation (4):

Short term win

Issues mainly from vendors' rather than the University regarding wooden pallets found in staff only areas. Any that belong to University can go into wood skip.

Recommended Action:

- Clarify pallet responsibility with vendors.
- Ensure University pallets go to the designated skips for proper recycling or reuse.



Recycle & Behaviour Items

Observation (1):

Short term win

Plastic cups are freely accessible in the catering areas, could be leading to unnecessary use.

Recommended Action:

Move cups behind the counter so they are only given on request, reducing waste.

Observation (2):

Short term win

Paper straws are freely available, increasing unnecessary use.

Recommended Action:

Move straws behind the counter so customers request them as needed.

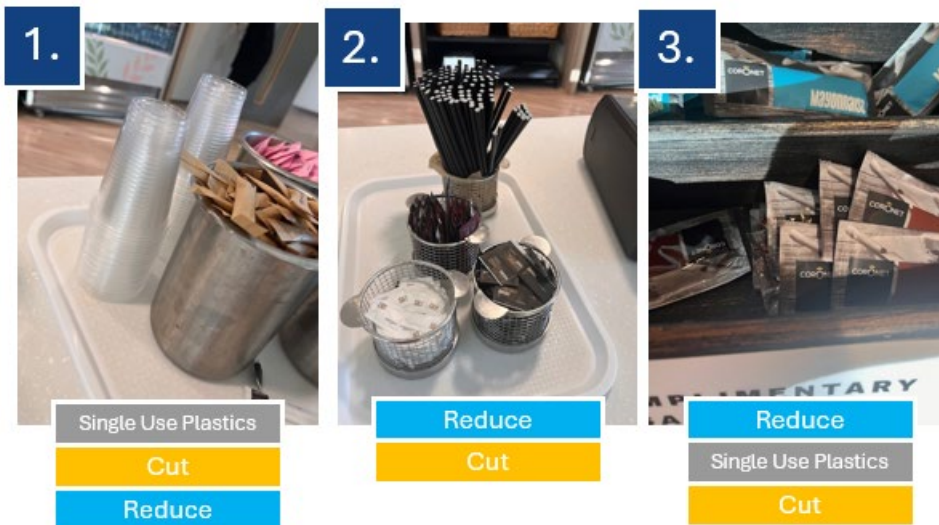
Observation (3):

Short term win

Single-use sauce sachets on the counter contribute to waste. They are also looking to be banned in the EU which will affect supply in the UK.

Recommended Action:

- Move sachets behind the counter to control usage.
- Consider installing sauce dispensers, similar to those used in McDonald's or IKEA cafés, to reduce single use plastics.



Composting Opportunities

At present, there are no on-site composting facilities capable of processing compostable packaging at Edge Hill University. As a result, compostable cups and lids cannot be recycled through existing waste streams.

Potential options include:

- Working with a local composting facility able to process food waste and compostable packaging
- Switching to recyclable alternatives compatible with DMR
- Exploring on-site technologies, such as biodigesters, where appropriate.

Observation (1): Short term win

Compostable lids may not be processed if composting facilities are unavailable.

Recommended Action:

Exchange for a recyclable polymer lid. We are currently working on multiple projects with lids and can provide feedback on findings to help guide selection.

Observation (2): Medium term win

Compostable cups require suitable composting facilities.

Recommended Action:

If facilities are unavailable, refer to the earlier coffee cup guidance. This includes assessing what each vendor is using and encouraging uniformity across the site.

Observation (3-6): Short term win

Items may not be recyclable or compostable if no facilities are available.

Recommended Action:

Consider switching to alternative recyclable materials. We can support the university in scoping suitable options and suppliers.



Summary and Next Steps

This audit highlights a range of practical opportunities to improve waste management and reduce environmental impact across catering operations at Edge Hill University.

Not all recommendations may be suitable for immediate implementation. However, documenting these opportunities allows the University to prioritise actions, explore feasibility, and make informed decisions.

The next step is for key Edge Hill University stakeholders and Biffa to review the findings together and agree on priority actions and timescales for delivery.

What this Means for Staff and Students

Small actions can make a big difference

The way waste is managed across campus relies on everyone understanding what goes where and why. Over time the introduction of clearer signage and more consistent bin setups will help make recycling simpler and reduce confusion.

More consistent packaging over time

Work is ongoing to encourage the use of packaging that can be recycled through existing systems. This will make it easier for staff and students to recycle correctly without needing specialist knowledge.

Everyone has a role to play

By following recycling guidance, avoiding contamination, and only taking disposable items when needed, staff and students help reduce waste, cut carbon impacts, and support Edge Hill University's long-term sustainability goals.