

What is Southampton Blackout?

Blackout is an annual electricity audit and switch off event at the University of Southampton, which aims to highlight the positive impact of small collective actions. It started in 2012 and has grown every year to incorporate more buildings and campuses.

What actually happens on the night?

Student and staff volunteers split into teams and spread out across the University to audit and switch off non-essential computing equipment that has been left on unnecessarily before a weekend.

How often does this take place?

The first Blackout event was in 2012, and it has taken place annually since then.

What's the goal of Blackout?

The primary goal of Blackout is to raise awareness of the amount of electricity and money that is wasted on campus every night and the positive impact that students and staff can have with small collective actions. We believe that raising awareness will help to positively influence behaviours in the future.

Blackout is also an opportunity to bring together hundreds of students and staff – from across departments and disciplines – to deliver something positive for the University.

Who runs Blackout?

On the night, Blackout is delivered by more than 200 student volunteers, and more than 50 staff volunteers coordinate them.

The event is organised by a small group of students and staff. Colleagues from SUSU, Engineering and the Environment, Estates and Facilities, Communications and Marketing and Health and Safety all work together for several months in the lead-up.

How do you measure the impact?

The impact can be measured in several ways:

Firstly, the number of pieces of equipment left on in each building is recorded, allowing us to prioritise electricity saving interventions in the future.

Secondly, we can infer from these results the actual electricity and cost saving achieved in one night, by looking at the amount of electricity used by just one computer over one night.

Thirdly, we can use the University's meter data to identify electricity usage over the weekend after Blackout and compare it with an average of three similar weekends. However, this option has become increasingly difficult because of the age of the University's metering equipment and the number of variables on our campuses.

There's also an immeasurable benefit that comes from bringing together more than 250 volunteers to deliver such an important event on campus, and the potential changes to their lifestyle and behaviours that they might be encouraged to make.

If I need to leave a piece of equipment on, can I opt out of Blackout?

There is an opportunity to opt out of Blackout, and this is communicated via Professional Services and Faculty offices in the lead up to each event. You will be required to complete a form and return it to the Blackout team. You will then be sent a poster to display on the piece of equipment that is to be left on. If the Blackout team believe that there is a more energy efficient solution, they will provide you with feedback. For example, [it is no longer necessary to leave your work computer on if you plan to work from home.](#)

Do I need to leave my computer on to work from home?

No, this is no longer necessary. iSolutions have [published a range of guidance](#) about accessing files and systems when working from home.

What awards has Blackout won?

The Blackout team were awarded a University of Southampton Vice-Chancellor's award after the first event in 2012 for dedication to the University. Shortly afterwards, they were nominated for a Green Gown award, the leading awards for sustainability in Higher Education, and were Highly Commended in the Student Engagement category.

Blackout was cited as an example of student/staff partnership good practice in the University's most recent Higher Education Review. It has also been included as an example of sector best practice in the HEFCE Sustainable Development in Higher Education policy framework.

What other universities take part in the Blackout?

Blackout was created at the University of Southampton, but in 2013 we were approached by the NUS (National Union of Students) about rolling the event out to other universities. In March 2014, this was piloted through Blackout Wales, with 6 institutions across Wales taking part on one night. In 2014/15, 11 institutions took part across the UK, with 378 students and 127 staff members switching off 10,306 appliances in total.