

Confronting the climate emergency

A commitment from UK universities



Contents

Foreword by Dr Tara Shine	1
Responding to the climate and ecological emergency	3
Universities are ready to do even more	5
What can the government do?	7
Action not words: universities leading the way on climate action	8
Developing the next generation of climate leaders	29



Foreword by Dr Tara Shine

Universities are vital in tackling climate change. They are at the heart of innovation and, most importantly, are excellent spaces for multi-disciplinary research and cross-sectional thinking. That is exactly what we need to solve the climate crisis.

Universities can collaborate with wider society in so many ways to accelerate the transition to a zero-carbon future – but the key thing they need to do is communicate. We have all the science to show that climate change is happening, as well as the impact it's having. We even have many of the technological solutions – but there are gaps in how we implement them. We will never succeed in delivering on policies and action if we don't engage everybody in the conversation.

So, my number one ask of universities is to talk about climate change, across every single discipline and in every piece of work that they do.

In order for society to really speed up the progress we need on climate change, there are six things we need.

1. Inspiration

Everybody needs to be inspired. Universities are important in that because they can help us to imagine and paint a picture of a better future. We need to stop being fearful of what it means and start getting excited.

2. Connection

Everybody needs to feel connected to what it is to be taking climate action – not just people who think they are green.

3. Empathy

We have to care about each other. We have to care about wider, global society, and we have to care about the planet if we are going to solve this problem.

4. Solidarity

No one country alone can solve climate change, and no university alone can solve the climate crisis. We all have to work together to find a global solution.

5. Money

We can't do this without investment. We have to invest money in the right things and stop investing in the wrong things.

6. Leadership

We need leadership from every level: from political leaders, community leaders, and our universities.

Dr Tara Shine

Dr Shine is co-founder and Director of [Change by Degrees](#), an award-winning business that advises organisations on sustainability strategy and reporting, employee engagement and sustainability communications.

Tara is Chair of the Board of Trustees of the [International Institute of Environment and Development \(IIED\)](#) and a member of faculty and lead facilitator for the visibility stream of [Homeward Bound](#), a global leadership programme for women in science. In 2020 Tara was appointed as co-facilitator of the Structured Expert Dialogue of the Second Periodic Review under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Dr Shine is author of [How to Save Your Planet One Object at a Time](#) published in April 2020 by Simon and Schuster. Most recently she [won](#) Network Ireland STEM Businesswoman of the Year Award 2021.

Responding to the climate and ecological emergency

The climate and ecological emergency is not new. For decades, universities have been at the forefront of efforts to combat climate change and embed sustainability in all areas of life across the UK.

But the need for change is now more urgent than ever, and universities are playing their part.

Education and skills

Universities are increasing climate literacy by embedding sustainability and climate justice in the curriculum for students and encouraging students and staff to understand their own behaviours and challenge others within the wider context of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals from the United Nations are an urgent and global call for action. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

Research and innovation

Universities are leading global efforts to drive change and adaptation within the wider context of the UN SDGs. A wide variety of disciplines provide solutions through technological breakthroughs, enhancing our knowledge of environmental consequences, international relations, and social, economic and behavioural responses to the emergency.

National and global leadership

UK universities use their expertise to advise decision-makers and collective bodies at the regional, national and international level to address the climate emergency.

Contributing locally

Collaborating with stakeholders, universities help to achieve local ambitions and advance local initiatives, not least supporting green recovery and growth.

Sustainable campuses

Universities are reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting biodiversity and developing their campuses in a sustainable way.



Universities are ready to do even more

Universities will show leadership from the top to make sure strategic, institutional actions are taken on sustainability.

UK universities commit to the following:

1. Set targets for scope 1 and 2 emission reductions which support the government's plans for reducing emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels and achieving net zero by 2050 at the latest (or devolved government equivalents).
2. Set a target for scope 3 emission reductions and other environmental targets beyond emissions, or commit to a programme of work to set targets as soon as possible.
3. Ensure that these targets are visible on their websites, alongside information on how the university is addressing the climate emergency through their teaching, research, leadership, local contributions and campus responsibilities (for example, through reference to existing sustainability plans or strategies, or the development of one).
4. Set out how progress against these targets will be reported in a transparent, consistent, and understandable way, and collectively work with official statistics providers to improve data collection.
5. Sign the UN's SDG Accord or embed elements of SDG Accord reporting into their existing reporting.
6. Use the Climate Commission's [Climate Action toolkit](#) to assess how further actions through the university's policies and reporting could advance the UN SDGs and respond to the climate emergency.

78%

Target reduction
in UK emissions
by 2035

Scope 1, 2 and 3

The Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol is used by the UK Government as the standard for emissions reporting. It classifies an organisation's GHG emissions into three 'scopes'.

Scope 1 covers all direct emissions by the organisation (eg emissions from gas boilers or vehicles owned by the organisation)

Scope 2 covers indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy (eg emissions from the power plant in order to supply the electricity used by the organisation)

Scope 3 emissions are the remaining indirect emissions that occur as a consequence of the activities of an organisation (eg the emissions from the goods and services purchased, or from staff travel and commuting)

What can the government do?

The government has recognised the importance of investing in decarbonisation – however, no direct investment or explicit recognition of the higher education sector has been given. Barriers to universities accessing the public sector decarbonisation scheme must be addressed.

The government's funding policies for teaching and research must support – and not undermine – the higher education sector's ambitions on sustainability. Funding policies must recognise the need for investment in infrastructure.

Any reductions to teaching funding in England would damage the ability of universities to be part of the solution to the climate emergency. Cuts to funding would reduce the amount available for investment in new technologies and infrastructure as well as limiting their education and local roles.

Changes like the recent government cuts to [Official Development Assistance](#) funding severely constrain the power of universities to combat the world's most pressing sustainability challenges.

To support the leaders of tomorrow, we are calling on government to work in partnership with universities through match-funded COP26 scholarships, to develop the next generation of climate leaders.



Action not words: universities leading the way on climate action

Universities UK's climate task and finish group steers our work on climate action and is chaired by Professor Judith Petts CBE, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Plymouth.

We asked the group to give their university's reflections on:

- their top challenge(s) on sustainability and how they have responded
- the change they wish to see across universities
- how government and universities can best work together to bring about change



University of Glasgow

Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, Vice-Chancellor and Principal

We have a clear target to be carbon neutral by 2030 and we were the first university in Scotland to declare a climate emergency in 2019.

In 2014 we were the first UK university to declare it would divest from fossil fuels within a decade and signed the SDG Accord in 2017.

In April 2020 we opened our [Centre for Sustainable Solutions](#) to support interdisciplinary, cross-campus and cross-sectoral solutions to climate change.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

We are a world-class, world-changing university – our students and staff make a meaningful positive impact on our global society through education, research and sharing knowledge. There is a carbon cost in our aspirations to be a world-leading university. However, we cannot achieve our goals at the expense of the environment.

‘We cannot achieve our goals at the expense of the environment.’

Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli,
University of Glasgow

We will introduce new measures including energy efficiency improvements, water source heat pump and solar panel installation, and a reduction in business travel. We will create research opportunities by investing in high-quality offsetting programmes including reforesting land or restoring peatland in Scotland, and similar projects in low- and middle-income countries around the world.

We need to address how we use university spaces much more seriously than we have until now, through central management of rooms, more efficient sharing of accommodation and flexible working policies.

We also want to raise public understanding of climate change and the challenges it represents for humanity, by engaging our staff and students.

What change do you hope to see?

Investment in decarbonisation is necessary for universities. Government recognition of this, such as addressing barriers to universities accessing the public sector decarbonisation scheme, would be welcome.

How should government and universities work together?

We cannot achieve climate resilience in isolation. Collaboration across universities and with government on transport infrastructure, utilities and IT will be essential.

Building new partnerships will enable sharing of best practice across the city of Glasgow and the UK and beyond.





University of Gloucestershire

Stephen Marston, Vice-Chancellor

We delivered a 63% reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2020 and are targeting net zero by 2030 across all 3 emissions scopes through our [Carbon Strategy](#).

We achieved 1st place in the People & Planet 2019 league. We are one of the United Nations' Regional Centres of Expertise in sustainability education and a signatory to the SDG Accord.

For over 15 years we have been committed to sustainability across our academic activities, wider operations and as an anchor institution in our region.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

Bringing sustainability out of the margins remains a significant challenge for all universities. We must mainstream sustainability into academic experiences and curriculum design so our graduates deliver sustainability solutions over the long term.

We have pioneered an integrated approach, to 'green' our operations across all sites and embed sustainability into the living and learning opportunities for our students. Examples of our actions include:

- Our students delivering carbon footprinting with Live Nation festivals.
- Our [Live Smart](#) programme where students lead change among their peers, across the university and with regional partners.
- We bring together learning, research and practice, such as our Graphic Design course assignments support the CheltenhamZero climate action partnership.



What change do you hope to see?

We hope that all students – including prospective students – will see universities are serious about sustainability. Not only in how we operate, but in their academic experience. We want them to be inspired and equipped to make a difference through their working lives, in the widest range of professional settings.

‘We hope that all students will see universities are serious about sustainability.’

Stephen Marston,
University of Gloucestershire

How should government and universities work together?

Research into solutions involving communities and international collaboration is essential – government can provide support with universities engaging with communities and providing education.

Greener local economies through regional collaboration and skills development could be achieved by dedicated decarbonisation funding for universities.





Goldsmiths, University of London

Professor Frances Corner OBE, Warden

We are committed to becoming a certified carbon neutral organisation by 2025 and a zero emissions campus by 2030. We declared a climate emergency in 2019.

Our ambitious targets, including a 30% reduction in our supply chain emissions by 2025, are set out in [PLAN25](#), our roadmap to carbon neutrality.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

Enacting the changes needed on our campus in a difficult financial environment is a challenge. Measures that will save us money and improve our environmental impact over the long term can involve significant up-front costs.

A range of funding options have helped put our sustainability plans into action. This includes Salix grant funding from the [Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme](#), which will support the installation of a new low-carbon heat network across major buildings on our campus.

‘I hope UUK’s shared policy positions will spark conversation, collaboration and most importantly action across universities.’

Professor Frances Corner OBE,
Goldsmiths, University of London

What change do you hope to see?

I hope UUK’s shared policy positions will spark conversation, collaboration and most importantly action across universities. Together we can demonstrate to current students, future students and communities how we are confronting this existential emergency.

How can government and universities best work together?

The government has the right ambitions but already we can see the huge challenges in realising them. As universities, we can support government to effect the change needed across society and support our communities through it. Equally as important as STEM, the arts, humanities and social sciences have a key role to play in reaching net zero.



Keele University

Professor Trevor McMillan, Vice-Chancellor

We were Global Sustainability Institution of the Year at the 2021 [Green Gown awards](#) and one of the first UK universities to declare a climate emergency in 2019.

We are striving to become carbon neutral by 2030 and published our [approach](#) to tackling the climate emergency.

We are at the forefront of sustainability innovation and research, with our [Institute for Sustainable Futures](#) driving research into issues such as climate change, food security and clean energy.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

The biggest challenge is deciding how to apply our resources. There are so many different areas of sustainability where we can make an impact, so we have to assess where our staff, students and campus can make the biggest difference.

We are proud we have embedded sustainability into everything we do – from our curriculum to our operations and everything in between. Everyone across the university has to think about what they can do to make a personal difference. Our aim is that when students graduate, they leave the university with sustainability embedded into their thinking – through this, we can really make a difference.

A recent example of our efforts is the creation of our low carbon energy generation park. In partnership with ENGIE, we've installed 12,500 solar panels and two wind turbines which will generate 50% of our campus electricity requirements from renewable sources. This will not only benefit the university and our local communities, but sets out a model for other organisations to follow.

'The importance of long-term core funding for research into the environment and the climate cannot be understated.'

Professor Trevor McMillan,
Keele University

What change do you hope to see?

The importance of long-term core funding for research into the environment and the climate cannot be understated. If we can apply the thinking from the government's innovation strategy to the environment and climate issues, we can all make a difference.

How can government and universities best work together?

The government's Innovation Strategy refers to the importance of collaboration – between universities, between public and private sectors, and between countries. If we can all come together on this agenda, we have the potential to produce something that has a real impact.





Newcastle University

Professor Julie Sanders, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost

We have a net zero target of 2030, and our whole university community co-created our [Climate Action Plan](#). We declared a climate emergency in 2019.

Our work with regional, national and global partners is guided by the UN SDGs, including our education, research, place and global portfolios.

Social and environmental justice is at the heart of our vision and strategy.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

The awakening to the climate and ecological emergencies has been inspiring. The student voice is really important. We need to address where practice is not yet aligned to our net zero ambition, working with integrity and transparency.

Sustainability done well requires commitment from all parts of the organisation from the curriculum to the allocation of resource to our work with external stakeholders. We have worked with purpose and pace through combining senior leadership commitment with our sustainability team working in a translational way. The team includes our own graduates, who work with students, leading research and education teams, governing bodies and finance committees, and key external partners including local authorities and the NHS.

What change do you hope to see?

A collaborative rather than competitive approach between universities is essential to make the deep changes needed in the next decade.

Agreed methods for measuring and reporting will enable the sector to work with integrity and at scale on difficult areas such as scope 3 emissions. We must balance global ambition with the principles of global social justice and sustainable development.

‘A collaborative rather than competitive approach between universities is essential’

Professor Julie Sanders,
Newcastle University

Robust reporting is needed as not all universities report consistently. Work by UUK and the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education (EAUC) must help embed changes.

How can government and universities best work together?

We need a shared commitment to a sustainability strategy informed by the UN SDGs to achieve advances at scale and at pace on the skills agenda, and plan for a future with sustainable and fair energy.

Universities and the government must work together with civic partners, schools and further education so young people develop climate leadership skills to navigate a complex and changed future.





University of Northampton

Victoria Blake, Environment and Sustainability Manager

We are committed to net zero carbon by 2030, are a signatory of UN SDG Accord and the One Planet Pledge.

We enhance biodiversity and equip students and staff with the skills needed in responding to climate change and ecological destruction.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

Embedding sustainable practices in complex areas such as aspects of travel and procurement, particularly where there may be perceived conflicts – for example, cost versus sustainable practices.

Our procurement process includes social and sustainable aspects where suppliers are required to outline how they will become a positive partner and support the university's strategic goals.

What change do you hope to see?

Common measuring and reporting of carbon emissions across the higher education sector is vital, enabling robust, consistent and transparent data provision for the sector.

How can government and universities best work together?

To work collaboratively through research and innovation and ensure that funding policies support and enable our ambitions to be realised.





University of Nottingham

Andy Nolan, Development and Sustainability Director

Our university strategy puts sustainability at the heart of our core goals that will guide our work for the years to come: 'We will make an outstanding contribution to supporting the UN SDGs ... We will place a special emphasis on environmental sustainability, supporting the City of Nottingham's desire to be a net zero carbon city by 2028.'

We are committed to environmental sustainability through our research, teaching, campus activity, investments and our work with partners locally and globally.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

Universities tackle climate change across the education, research and place-making aspects of our role. We must develop tomorrow's leaders, agents of change who can rise to the challenges we face. We must produce research that leads to innovation to solve global sustainability challenges. Nottingham's research includes expertise on developing [Net Zero Aviation](#), food and agriculture, green chemicals, sustainable energy, and the social impacts of climate change. Nottingham is committed to delivering against the UN SDGs. Finally, universities must play a key role as place makers in the towns and cities in which they are located. The [Universities for Nottingham](#) initiative is an example of collaboration across multiple partners to achieve longer term strategic planning.

Policy stability and certainty are needed so we can take a long term view – this applies to government education, industrial and sustainability strategies. Operationally our biggest challenge is to decarbonise how we heat buildings and water given our reliance on natural gas. We are taking a long term view with how we plan our investments to reduce our demand for heat. We are integrating this investment in a 20+ year campus planning process.

'Policy stability and certainty are needed so we can take a long term view'

Andy Nolan,
University of Nottingham

What change do you hope to see?

Recognition of the scale of opportunity universities have to make a difference – through our teaching, research, operations, influence and policy development. Government should provide financial support or mechanisms for investment in carbon reduction to reduce operational emissions (scopes 1, 2 and 3). We also need a consistent sector-wide recommended approach to reporting carbon emissions.

How should government and universities work together?

Universities support government to tackle the climate emergency by sharing our extensive research knowledge and expertise with policy makers. In turn, government should take a long-term approach and work with universities as pathfinders and catalysts for decarbonisation and climate resilience.





University of Plymouth

Professor Judith Petts CBE FRGS FAcSS FRSA, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive

We have set net zero targets of 2025 for scope 1 and 2 emissions and 2030–50 for scope 3. This is part of our declaration of a climate emergency and our commitment to the UN SDG Accord.

So far, we have achieved a 62% reduction in carbon emissions.

We believe three elements are essential – achieving net zero emissions, adapting and building resilience to future climates, and generating knowledge and skills that will drive sustainable living.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

Identifying and investing in priority actions that will have the most impact is complex. Actions must not just reduce carbon emissions, but also drive long-term sustainability. Priority actions are not always ‘popular’ actions.

We have enhanced climate literacy for all students and staff. We embedded climate and sustainability priorities in all of our strategic plans (including education and student experience, research and innovation, digital, estates, international, equality and diversity, health, safety and wellbeing). We are transparent about our progress and actions are informed by analysing our performance. We also work with business partners, local authorities, and the community to make the most of opportunities.

‘Actions must not just reduce carbon emissions, but also drive long-term sustainability’

Professor Judith Petts CBE,
University of Plymouth



What change do you hope to see?

Universities sharing a voice on the importance of responding to climate and sustainability challenges. We have a vital role in emissions reductions, research, climate literacy, national and international sustainability leadership, and community impact. There is not a one-size fits all solution, however. Enhanced sharing of learning and experience across the sector is important given the natural diversity of institutions and their differing experience and progress.

How can government and universities work together?

Progress in climate and sustainability actions is a shared responsibility. The greatest impacts will need joint working between universities, government, business and international partners. The greatest changes can only be achieved if there is adequate government investment in the knowledge and resources of universities – through the teaching grant, research funding, brokering of partnerships with the private and public sectors, and support to estate and decarbonisation investment.





University of Reading

Professor Mark Fellowes, Chair of the university's Environmental Sustainability Committee and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Academic Planning and Resources

We are committed to meeting net zero targets by 2030.

We have reduced our carbon emissions by 45% in the last decade and installed more than 3,500 solar panels across our campuses.

We are committed to an environmentally sustainable future. We are a world-leader in climate and environmental research, empower every student and staff member to learn about the UN SDGs, and work with local communities and leaders to support their ambitions.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

Reducing our carbon footprint while delivering cutting edge research and teaching has been a huge challenge. We balance large energy demands for our facilities and buildings with ambitious targets to slash our emissions.

We invest in technologies to make the energy we use greener, cleaner and cheaper. This includes ground source heat pumps and thousands of solar panels. For the past 10 years we have bought electricity from renewable sources. We increased the amount of waste that is recycled and incentivised the use of public transport. We constantly improve how we are run, share our research, and learn together to mitigate environmental threats.

'Lack of alignment has created a gap between those in need of answers and those with potential solutions.'

Professor Mark Fellowes,
University of Reading

Partnering with the right people in government or elsewhere remains a barrier to using our expertise to make positive changes to the world. A siloed system and lack of alignment has created a gap between those in need of answers and those with potential solutions.

We were proactive in bringing scientists, teaching professionals, policymakers, young people and campaigners together for a [Climate Education Summit in September 2021](#). This has led to positive engagement with government and putting ideas into practice to bring about change.

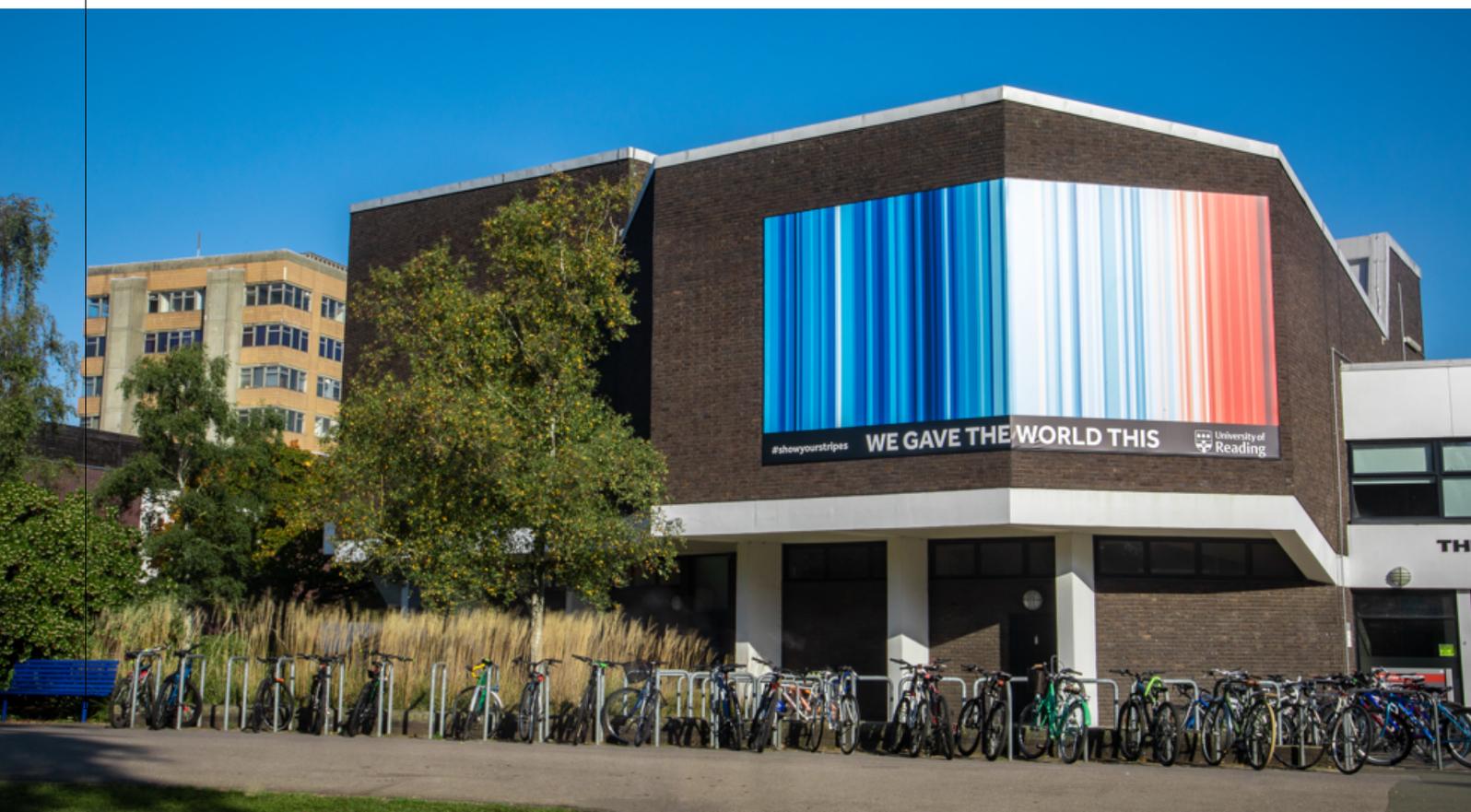
What change do you hope to see?

Universities should be leaders on climate action and levers of change in their local and regional communities. This must be matched by support from government so universities can make greener decisions without penalty. Supporting communities overseas to build resilience to climate challenges using UK research is also essential and requires financial backing from government.

How can government and universities work together?

Working collaboratively (like our recent work on climate education) drives informed action and progress. Universities are well-placed to lead on developing and galvanising networks and partnerships which government can work with.

Cuts to funding for [Official Development Assistance](#) literally puts lives in danger as the world faces increasingly severe natural hazards. Government and universities can work hand in hand to deliver solutions and information to those that need it most.





University of South Wales

Professor Paul Harrison, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Innovation and Engagement

We are aiming to be carbon neutral by 2040.

Sustainability is one of our top priorities, and we are committed to overcome the challenges through involvement at all levels at the university.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

Sustainability has a far-reaching impact and encompasses activities across all areas in a university. The biggest challenge is the breadth of behavioural, operational and physical change which we need to achieve, along with the significant level of investment that would need to be committed to make these changes.

Not only is our university executive team committed to sustainability, but we are growing our network of sustainability committees and champions to involve individuals at all levels to achieve the changes we want to make.

What change do you hope to see?

The more focus there is on the climate emergency, the more backing and resource there will hopefully be for change to be made. Ambitious targets and legislative requirements will accelerate action.

‘The more focus there is on the climate emergency, the more backing and resource there will hopefully be for change to be made.’

Professor Paul Harrison,
University of South Wales

How can government and universities work together?

Universities are uniquely positioned as a hub of senior experts in their field, and students with the energy to act upon the world around them. Government can engage with universities by harnessing the knowledge of academics to inform decision making and create opportunities for those who wish to pursue a career in the environmental sector. Government can also set the conditions to ensure universities and all organisations work together to collectively achieve the necessary changes to tackle the climate and ecological emergency.



Staffordshire University

Professor Martin Jones, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Designate

We have signed the [One Planet Pledge](#) and are committed to achieving a carbon net zero position by 2030.

We are committed to reducing our scope 3 emissions – including emissions of partners and suppliers and staff travelling to work – by working with the wider community.

We are achieving major change in environmental sustainability through research, innovation and enterprise and student and civic engagement.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

Our built environment is both our biggest challenge and opportunity. Buildings and facilities built prior to 2010 may not be designed for the conditions now being experienced. This could have an impact on the health and wellbeing of students and staff using those buildings and may also result in an increase in the cost of operating and maintaining those buildings.

The built environment is one of four key themes in our environmental sustainability strategy and is informing our long-term campus transformation, already underway. New builds are designed using the principles of low carbon, high energy efficiency and flexibility of use as a starting point. Building materials used for new builds and refurbishments are sustainable and selected for their contribution to the carbon net zero target. We are exploring alternative energy sources and looking at biodiversity on our campuses.

What change do you hope to see?

We hope the government will support and invest in sustainable infrastructure projects at universities, recognise universities and research as part of the solution to the climate emergency and actively develop the next generation of climate leaders through dedicated courses and scholarship opportunities.



How can government and universities work together?

Government should work more closely with university researchers to recognise and combat the world's most pressing sustainability challenges. Working with government, universities can make a significant contribution to thought leadership and action in environmental sustainability as part of its response to the UN SDGs, through research, innovation, sharing knowledge and enterprise.

'We hope the government will recognise universities and research as part of the solution to the climate emergency'

Professor Martin Jones,
Staffordshire University



University of York

Mark Clough, Sustainability Manager

We apply the UN SDGs to deliver the most significant impact and focus our actions.

Our ambitious carbon emission targets (covering all scopes) will be published at the end of October 2021.

We are developing a campus estate and university governance that is proactive and adapts to climate change, through behaviour changes, reduced consumption, space usage policies, increased efficiencies, sustainable travel policies, and technological implementation.

What are the challenges and how are you meeting them?

One major challenge is the age of our campus and the existing, poorly insulated infrastructure, including listed buildings, which creates an ongoing challenge in our bid to achieve a sustainable campus. One element to identifying solutions lies in collaboratively working with the City of York Council, community and other parties with similar challenges.

Our annual intake of international students provides a range of beneficial sustainability impacts, but also has associated environmental impacts and challenges from travel. The launch of our Sustainability Plan in October 2021 will pull our actions together, ensuring a co-ordinated approach to sustainability outcomes. We are also adapting our taught courses to reflect the sustainability-focused knowledge required within the workplace from our graduates.

‘One element to identifying solutions lies in collaboratively working with the City of York Council, community and other parties’

Mark Clough,
University of York

Another challenge is the current absence of national policy that can drive change, and a real lack of suitable, readily available and affordable low carbon technologies.

What change do you hope to see?

Greater public recognition of the value and relevance of universities, and greater collaboration between universities, communities and industry to share insight and make better use of university research. More robust methodology for measuring and reporting across the sector on emissions is also needed.

How can government and universities work together?

Better funding opportunities are needed to support critical sustainability changes on campus. Government should support changes to education and job training to create an agile skilled workforce. Workers must be enabled to retrain later in life to reflect rapid technological and theoretical developments and to cover the diverse range of future sustainability jobs needed for us all to adapt to climate change.

Developing the next generation of climate leaders

To mark the UK hosting the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in 2021, many universities are offering new support to students to develop the future generation of climate leaders. We asked some to tell us what they are offering and how matched funding by government could make an even bigger difference.



University of Glasgow

Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, Principal and Vice-Chancellor

What new support to students will you be offering to mark COP26?

We have committed £100,000 of funding to launch new Climate Leadership Scholarships that will support students undertaking postgraduate programmes linked to the sustainability agenda. With COP26 coming to Glasgow, there is an incredible platform for our students to take a lead on a range of new initiatives that will be supported and developed in the future.

We are proud to offer a range of opportunities to our student community to engage with the sustainability and climate justice agenda. Through our new [Centre for Sustainable Solutions](#) we offer courses in climate literacy and leadership to our student community. We empower our students to inform our environmental practices through our environmental sustainability team.

How would matched funding by government make a difference?

It would allow us to increase both the volume and value of scholarships available, which will have a tangible impact on our communities. It would make our scholarships more accessible to students who are aiming to gain vital skills and expertise in sustainability to help to tackle some of the world's greatest challenges. There is high interest and demand from students in these areas.





Goldsmiths, University of London

Professor Frances Corner OBE, Warden

What new support to students will you be offering to mark COP26?

To be part of the COP26 legacy in the UK, we intend to offer three fully-funded scholarships for home students across five eligible programmes. These are our [MA Art and Ecology](#), [MA Ecology, Culture and Society](#) (both launched this academic year), [MA Politics, Development and the Global South](#), [MA Anthropology, Ecology and Global Justice](#) and our [MA Global Political Economy](#).

We are also launching action plans for our curriculum and research as part of the Green New Deal project. We know that sustainability and climate justice are the top global issues students want to learn about, and we will embed these key areas into our curriculum.

How would matched funding by government make a difference?

It would allow us to support those who would otherwise not have access to postgraduate study. It would also mean the college could offer a COP26 scholarship to students on each of the eligible courses.





Newcastle University

Professor Julie Sanders, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost

What new support to students will you be offering to mark COP26?

We are running a Climate Leadership Scholarships scheme for the next two years – launching at the time of COP26. The scholarships will enable around 200 undergraduate students to carry out research in areas that address the UN SDGs, while also developing accredited climate leadership skills.

Students will have the opportunity to create and work on a range of research-based projects from living lab activities on our own university campuses to field trip opportunities. The scholarships provide opportunities for experiential learning locally and globally with industry partners across all disciplines.

While we have many research-based modules and programmes addressing sustainability and climate justice, these new scholarships place a special emphasis on bringing students together across disciplines and programmes to develop accredited leadership skills with real world applications for their graduate futures.

By sharing their experiences, climate scholarship students will inspire current and future students to engage with climate justice. We are exploring how our Climate Leadership scholars could benefit from training to deliver carbon literacy training to other students and academic and professional services colleagues.

‘By sharing their experiences, climate scholarship students will inspire current and future students to engage with climate justice.’

Professor Julie Sanders,
Newcastle University

How would matched funding by government make a difference?

It would enable us to expand the number of students able to access this opportunity even further and to offer support to industry and external partners at scale – further expanding the positive graduate outcomes for these students. There are also the knowledge exchange potentials of the scheme in a regional context.

These scholarships will include student stipend and climate conscious travel expenses. Matched funding would enable even more students to experience research first-hand and to develop key skills they need.



University of Nottingham

Andy Nolan, Development and Sustainability Director

What new support to students will you be offering to mark COP26?

We will be engaging students with communications and campaigns to highlight the key issues being discussed at COP26 and the contributions we make to sustainability on campus and through our research. We will also collaborate with the students' union which will lead campaigns to encourage students to be active in addressing sustainability and environmental issues.

This is part of our long-standing commitment to enable students to access learning that enhances their understanding of sustainability. Students can learn through their formal curriculum through their choice of modules, participate in extra-curricular activities, volunteering or internships, or take up research opportunities with projects ranging from carbon capture and storage to corporate social responsibility.

How would matched funding by government make a difference?

Achieving net zero may disrupt traditional business models and the delivery of education. Universities can set direction, but magnitude of travel is critical. Matched funding would allow us to collectively deliver on our environmental commitments and bring coherency to sector-wide ambition.

'Matched funding would allow us to collectively deliver on our environmental commitments and bring coherency to sector-wide ambition.'

Andy Nolan,
University of Nottingham





Nottingham Trent University

Professor Edward Peck CBE, Vice-Chancellor

What new support to students will you be offering to mark COP26?

We are introducing a package of bursaries to promote sustainability awareness and action through education. The bursaries are targeted at students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are opting to pursue an area of study closely aligned with the UN SDGs. They will support the additional costs that are involved to develop the student's democratic climate-leadership skills and research projects, including but not limited to field trips, specialist equipment and sustainable travel to conferences and events.

The recipients will be supported by academic specialists in environmental sustainability, who will guide students to appropriately navigate the extensive range of opportunities available at the university. This annual award will financially support students to become the next generation of climate leaders, advocating for realistic improvements both within the student community and beyond.

Supporting a group of future leaders will help our students to recognise and fulfil their responsibilities as global citizens, establishing strong and lasting links between sustainability, literacy and employability.

How would matched funding by government make a difference?

We are committed to ensuring all our graduates are socially and environmentally responsible to drive positive change for the future. We put considerable resources in to enable students from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome financial barriers and to engage with sustainability programmes and other opportunities at the university.

Matched funding would help us provide an enhanced programme for some of our very best students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We could also expand our sustainability modules to all subjects to ensure that sustainable thinking is ingrained in our graduates.





University of Plymouth

Professor Jerry Roberts, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)

What new support to students will you be offering to mark COP26?

We will begin funding three COP26 PhD scholarships in 2022 with a strong interdisciplinary focus supported across our three research institutes (Marine, Sustainable Earth, and Health and Care Research). We are also looking at giving additional financial support to projects and placements for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students to enable exciting work focused on sustainable development.

This will be alongside the majority of our curricula which supports climate and sustainability learning. We also promote opportunities for our students to engage in climate action through internships, projects and placements.

How would matched funding by government make a difference?

It would enable us to extend the scope of support to benefit a much greater number of students and the organisations they could engage with.





University of Sussex

Professor Rachel Mills, Provost

What new support to students will you be offering to mark COP26?

We will be announcing the creation of five Sussex Climate Leadership Scholarships per year (of £3,000 per year) from the 2022–23 academic year onwards.

We will also be announcing three one off COP Climate Leader Prizes of £3,000 each for our current students who show outstanding climate leadership in the run up to and immediate aftermath of the COP this academic year.

This support fits with our ambitious sustainability strategy, [Sustainable Sussex](#), which commits us to being one of the most sustainable universities in the world.

The new climate leader prizes and scholarships will help us to deliver on the first theme of our strategy, ‘ethical educators’, which will embed sustainability into all aspects of student learning, experience and research. It will also support our target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2035 and our existing activities such as our [Pitch for the Planet](#) sustainable innovation competition.

How would matched funding by government make a difference?

It would enable us to double the number of annual scholarships for climate leadership provided to domestic undergraduate, masters and postgraduate students.

This would help incentivise more young people to become climate leaders at a local level, motivating and leading their peers to change their behaviour in support of the government’s levelling up agenda.

Sussex climate leaders will also be required as a condition of their scholarships to deliver engagement events with the local community around tackling climate change and reaching net zero together.

‘Matched funding would help incentivise more young people to become climate leaders at a local level’

Professor Rachel Mills,
University of Sussex

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Universities UK acts on behalf of universities, represented by their heads of institution.



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