

THE DIVEST TO DECOLONISE TOOLKIT



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM



CAMPAIGN
AGAINST
ARMS
TRADE



people & planet

nus
national union of students

ABOUT

In the UK and other Western countries, we are often sold a narrative about our education as a place of open-mindedness and progressiveness.

However, the UK education system has always been deeply involved with colonialism.



We wrote this toolkit with the help of our partners:

- SOS-UK, a student-led organisation who support students and wider society to learn, act and lead for environmental justice.
- People & Planet, the UK's largest student network campaigning on social and climate justice.
- dED-UCATION, a community and guide for peacemakers working to see universities break their ties with the global arms trade and champion world peace.
- Campaign Against Arms Trade, a UK-based campaigning organisation working towards the abolition of the international arms trade.

"Divestment campaigns are a way of showing our institutions that we are not fooled by their co-option of the term 'decolonise': we say no to their material complicity in colonial violence."

Sara Khan,
NUS Vice-President Liberation and Equality

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the playlist



HOW IS OUR EDUCATION COMPLICIT?

The education system in the UK has always been materially complicit in colonialism.

Many university buildings were financed by those who obtained their wealth through colonial violence, including the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the pillaging of Indigenous land and communities.

The legacy of climate violence began here too, with land which had been taken care of by its Native inhabitants for centuries destroyed by settlers in order to build cities, plantations, roads, and railways. Natural resources were stripped away to hoard wealth.

It was Western knowledge – developed in our Universities – that gave people the ability to map, justify, exploit, and destroy.

When we understand that our education system in the UK has always been a tool of colonial violence, it makes it easier to understand why it still is. But how is the UK education system complicit in colonialism today?

This complicity takes multiple forms. The main types of complicity we'll be looking at are investments, careers, research, banks, sponsorships and affiliations across the world.

Universities

In practice, this looks like...

Colleges

INVESTMENTS

- UK universities are currently structured like businesses.
- They have a pot of donated funds, often from wealthy alumni, which they invest for financial return.
- These investments often go to companies responsible for upholding colonialism and imperialism.

RESEARCH

- Many universities have research partnerships with companies and institutions responsible for colonialism and imperialism.
- Top universities receive on average £44 million from these organisations.

BANKS

- Just like businesses, all UK universities must have a bank.
- Many banks chosen by universities were founded to fund colonialism and slavery.

CAREERS

- Colleges have careers partnerships with organisations responsible for colonialism and imperialism (for example, the Army Cadets in schools).
- Often these organisations are global and harm workers across the world, for example textile companies.

APPRENTICESHIPS

- Many college students are also apprentices. This is to cover their living expenses or to build experience while learning.
- Many harmful companies such as BAE Systems and Shell take advantage of this and use apprenticeships to look like they're having a 'positive social impact'.

SPONSORSHIPS

Sponsorships are often used to create an image of 'having positive social impact'.

This looks like:

- Organising talks on campus from their CEOs.
- Funding academic posts.
- Awarding prizes to students.
- Funding bursaries and grants for students.

GLOBALISATION

- Many universities have campuses abroad which extend their colonial reach.
- They also have courses in partnership with universities abroad specialised in colonial and harmful industries. For example, the University of Manchester is partnered with the University of Calgary in Canada, where you can take a Chemical and Petroleum engineering course.

BANKS

- Banks advertise discounted services to students, but often forget to mention that they funded South African Apartheid and are still involved in fossil fuel infrastructures.

INVESTMENTS

- Colleges and Sixth Forms are often funded by local councils which hold investments in companies responsible for upholding colonialism and imperialism.

MORE ON THE DECOLONISERS LIBRARY

- 'Invest for Change: campaigning guide' by SOS UK
- 'University Complicity' by Apartheid Off Campus
- 'Colonialism + Capitalism = Climate Crisis' by Global Justice Now
- 'To fix the climate crisis we must face up to our imperial past' by Open Democracy
- 'Divest Barclays' by People & Planet
- 'Police, War and Empire' by Campaign Against the Arms Trade

INVESTMENTS FROM OUR UNIVERSITIES

UK education providers are deeply entangled with many companies who are responsible for past and present harm caused by colonialism and imperialism.

In this toolkit we're going to focus on companies working in fossil fuel industries and the arms trade.

Universities support them through their investments, research, and partnerships with some of the biggest fossil fuel and arms companies in the world, like BP, Shell or BAE Systems. Investments in companies are held within university investment portfolios.

Through these investments, universities are not only financially supporting these industries, but they are providing them with valuable credibility: a 'social licence'.

With this social licence, these industries are able to continue operating as they do, in spite of the climate crisis and in spite of communities across the globe whose lands, lives and livelihoods are harmed by wars and climate devastation.

By supporting these companies, universities are damaging their own credibility. It is our roles to hold them accountable.

Universities are meant to be for the public good, from teaching forward-thinking to conducting life-changing research. They often form reputations around their 'social responsibility'. Investments in the fossil fuel industry, the arms trade and all institutions upholding colonialism and imperialism, directly contradict this.



HOW DO WE STOP THEM?

A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

1

Research your institution

- Research your institution's investments with tools such as:
 - People & Planet's Fossil Free Scorecards
 - Searching on WhatDoTheyKnow.com
 - By making a Freedom of Information request
- You will find more info on all of this in the toolkit's appendix.

2

Negotiate

- Email your Vice-Chancellor, Finance Director or Sustainability Manager to request a meeting with them.
- During the meeting be clear about what you want and insist for it to be minuted.
- Look at the appendix to find a template email to request that meeting and the Invest for Change guide for more info.

3

Organise

- Contact SOS UK, People & Planet, dED_UCATION, CAAT and Friends of the Earth for support.
- Create a group with friends and other campaigners (students or staff).
- Plan your next steps, whether it's a students' union motion, a petition or a direct action, with our campaign guide (link in the appendix).

YOUR PLAN OF ACTION

List the specific people who have power and influence over your university's investments:

1		2		3	
4		5			

Now, for each of them, write down the kind of power or influence they have and specifically what you need from them:

1		2		3	
4		5			

Finally, what actions will you take to get them to do the thing you need them to do, in order to get your university to divest:

1		2		3	
4		5			

LOCAL COUNCILS' COMPLICITY

UK local Councils are responsible for funding Further Education institutions like colleges. They are also responsible for upholding colonialism and imperialism through their investments and practices in the local area. This includes developers gentrifying our neighbourhoods, contract tenders with colonial companies, police presence in our neighbourhoods and schools, a car-centric approach instead of investment public transport, cuts to key community services and council workers, and pension funds invested into the fossil fuel and arms industries. Creating change will involve lobbying them with their preferred methods of communication as well as public pressure.

1 Lobbying your Council from the inside

-  Writing letters – Use this to express your concerns but also to build a paper trail to hold them accountable if/when they do not reply.
-  Attending meetings with councillors – This gets you in the room with influencers and decision-makers who push your demands forward.
-  Submitting questions to council committees - You can ask the committee directly about your issue and bring forward any research/evidence to back this up.

2 Lobbying your Council from the outside

-  Marches or protests – This builds public support and is an opportunity to speak to people in your local area about the campaign.
-  Petitions – This shows your council how many people care about the issue. This is a great entry point for new campaign supporters.
-  Publicity stunts – This draws attention to your campaign from the public and press. For example, in Hampshire, activists dressed in hazmat suits and chalked bodies on the floor, declaring the council a “climate crime scene”.

YOUR PLAN OF ACTION

Question 1

Write a draft email to your local council about its pension investments.

Question 2

Write an ask for your petition. How are you planning on getting signatures?

Question 3

When is your next council meeting? Which questions can you ask them?

Question 4

Your council is not listening to your demands. How will you protest this?

OUR EDUCATION CAREERS' SERVICES

Careers Services help students and graduates find jobs in all kinds of businesses. Some of these businesses are harmful, both to our planet, and the people that live on it. For example, companies that extract fossil fuels or make weapons are not good for our future.

Careers Services do this by:

- Hosting these companies at careers fairs
- Promoting job listings for these companies
- Emailing students and graduates about career opportunities with these companies
- Creating brochures and leaflets that include them
- Holding meetings between students and businesses
- Putting students on placements with these companies

Without this help from our education providers, it would be much harder for these businesses to recruit the workers they need.



Universities and colleges are actively assisting them in securing the future of their business model.

Sustainability and ethics should guide Careers Services in who they choose to work with. It is in our power to call on our education providers to exclude harmful industries from opportunities to advertise to students.

The student movement has a long history of shutting down harmful companies at careers fairs. Now we need to address the root cause of the issue: that these companies are invited to our campuses in the first place.

HOW DO WE CHANGE THIS?

1

CONTACT YOUR CAREERS SERVICE

If they don't know about your concerns they are unlikely to act on them. Tell them why you care about them partnering with harmful businesses! You can find their contact details on your institution's website.



2

PASS A STUDENTS' UNION MOTION

Get your institution to commit to ending the fossil fuels and arms industry careers pipeline by passing a motion. Have a look at the appendix for template motions.



3

TEAM UP WITH WORKERS UNIONS

Show that staff are also behind your campaign. Reach out to your institution's UCU, UNISON and other trade union branches. You can also work with staff to organise alternative careers fairs.



4

ORGANISE (LEAFLETS & PETITIONS)

Distributing leaflets, displaying posters on your campus, or asking for petition signatures can be good ways to raise awareness about your campaign. You can use online methods too, like commenting on your institution's social media pages and hashtags.



5

MOBILISE (DIRECT ACTIONS)

These companies will likely be present during your careers fairs, so why not attend them yourself with other campaigners and make your objections known to everyone?

YOUR PLAN OF ACTION

Contacting your Careers service

You have contacted your careers service to say you no longer want your university partnering with harmful companies. How could you get 10, 50, or even 100 people to send a similar email?

Passing a motion

You want to submit a motion banning harmful companies from advertising in your institution. How could you mobilise students around that motion?

Make noise at the Careers Fair

Your university careers fair is coming up and you have seen companies like Shell and BAE Systems will be in attendance recruiting students. How could you disrupt your careers fair to stop this recruitment from happening?

YOUR BANKS

Within our current society, most of us, and almost all institutions, will need to use a bank in some way. Although there are alternatives to traditional banking, large corporate banks are currently funneling billions into the fossil fuel industry, arms trade and most of the industries driving climate breakdown and social injustice. In the UK the 'big 5' are Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds, NatWest and Santander.

WEAPONS

Since 2000, an estimated 60% of the world's conflict-related deaths have been in the Middle East and North Africa region, while violence in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen continues to displace millions of people annually.

How: 10 European banks have some of the highest investments in global arms companies involved in these conflicts, financing up to £20.7 billion.

TAX AVOIDANCE

Tax avoidance involves businesses' manipulation to pay fewer taxes. In 2017, it was estimated that, globally, tax avoidance was losing nations over £360 billion a year which should've gone to fund essential public services.

How: Banks not only loan to companies who use tax avoidance strategies, but also directly help people dodge tax.

FACTORY FARMING

Industrial agriculture is a major contributor to the climate crisis, causing issues such as mass deforestation, exploitation of farmers and communities living on the land.

How: Loans totalling around £120 billion have flowed from over 200 banks to the world's thirty-five largest meat and dairy corporations, which together emit more than the economies of the UK.

FOSSIL FUELS

Burning fossil fuels that trap heat in the earth's atmosphere, leads to global climate change. This has huge impacts on all life on earth, especially those least responsible for the crisis.

How: 35 global banks financed fossil fuels with £1.9 trillion. This is since the Paris Agreement, an agreement to tackle climate change, in 2015 and has increased year on year.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Many banks directly violate rights themselves but they also contribute to abuses by financially supporting other companies who are violating human rights.

How: Reports found that UK banks and financial institutions hold shares worth over £10.8 billion in companies that sell weapons, military equipment and technology to countries who use them to harm populations.



TELL THEM B* BYE

As we will currently still need banks, what is the alternative option to the bad banks?

Well, we can either move to a more 'ethical' bank:

- with an 'ethical' policy,
- a screening process dictating which companies it will and won't invest in
- and it commits in a clear and quantifiable way, to action on issues you care about

Or move to a cooperative or "mutual" ownership financial institution:

- this means somewhere owned by its members, the actual users, rather than external investors.
- most of them are also operated in order to promote financial inclusion – meaning they charge lower interest rates and will often lend to those turned away by big banks.

Your targets	Your actions
Institutional – get your university or college to change banks!	1. Build a campaign team and mobilise your peers. 2. Meet with your university or college finance team. 3. Ask them to implement their ethical policy and change bank.
Individual – call on fellow students and staff to switch banks!	1. Share your learning with your peers. 2. Pass a motion/policy in your students' union. 3. Organise a public walk-out from the banks. (More in appendix)
Win and publicise the switch!	1. Write an open letter to the bank you are leaving explaining why. 2. Post it on your social media and tag your bank. 3. Go to a branch of your bank as a group and inform the manager.

YOUR PLAN OF ACTION

One customer leaving has some impact, but many customers leaving together can drive systemic change over time. A group of students could be powerful in this regard!

Step 1: List below specific arguments you can use to convince your institutions and friends to change their bank.

Step 1

Step 2: Write down key points you could have on a poster or flyer to raise awareness on the issue.

Step 2

Step 3: Draw some ideas of direct actions you could take with your peers to make your switch visible to all.

Step 3

CONCLUSION

Sometimes things are so rotten, they have to burn to make way for something new. The truth is, the system isn't broken, it's working exactly the way it's supposed to. We can't reform it, we have to overhaul it. The soil that's left behind will be fertile for something new, something better to grow. Divestment isn't the end, it's only the beginning.

What do we do once our institutions have divested their money from colonial companies? Once they've stopped platforming them at events and careers fairs? Once they've severed their links with banks and all the rest?

The fact that our educational institutions have investments at all is part of the problem. Universities, colleges, and schools should not be run like businesses, they shouldn't be businesses at all. We are students, not numbers. We are community members, not customers. We are people, not a future workforce for churning out more and more profit for the system.

We need to end the marketisation of education, just a wheel in the cog of this country's move towards privatising everything. The money and resources divested from colonial violence needs to go straight into the hands of our communities. It needs to go into adequate housing, lifelong education, and universal healthcare for all, free at the point of access.

We hope this toolkit will help you begin this journey. Together, we can build a better world.





GLOSSARY

COLONIALISM

Colonialism is control by one power over another area and/or people through establishing settlements and/or exploiting resources. The Indigenous population are directly ruled, displaced, or exterminated. Colonising nations usually control the resources, labour and markets of the colonial territory. Often, they also impose socio-cultural, religious and linguistic structures on the Indigenous population.

IMPERIALISM

Imperialism is a set of policies or practices that extend the power and control of one nation over the political, economic, and cultural life of other ones. Imperialism can be understood as the logic that drives colonial projects - it is used to gain or maintain an empire.

DECOLONISATION

Decolonisation challenges, resists, and dismantles ongoing colonialism imposed through Western powers. Decolonisation is tied to colonialism, but is inseparable from matters of imperialism, social justice, capitalism, and White Supremacy.

Decolonisation is a goal but it is not an endpoint. Decolonisation is political, but it is also economic (in the possession of resources), educational (in the imposition of knowledge), cultural (in the erasure of values, attitudes, language, and beliefs), and psychological (internalisation of oppression). The goal of decolonisation is for colonised people to achieve sovereignty — the right and ability of colonised people to practice self-determination over their land, cultures, and political and economic systems.

FOSSIL FUEL

Coal, oil, natural gas, and tar sands are all examples of fossil fuels. Humans extract fossil fuels and burn it to release energy for use. They are extracted through mining and drilling. Fossil fuels cause serious environmental damage and direct negative consequences on local communities at every stage in their use: extraction, transportation, and consumption of the fuels.

ARMS TRADE

The arms trade is the industry making and selling weapons and other military and 'security' equipment and services. Governments buy arms from their own national industries and/or others, and sometimes one country gives arms away to another.

It is a deadly, corrupt business that fuels conflict, reinforces global systems of oppression and supports human rights-abusing regimes, while wasting valuable resources. It does this with the full support of governments around the world. Most major producers, including the UK, are responsible for perpetuating major wars and repression.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate justice recognises the climate crisis as a social and political problem, as well as an environmental one. It acknowledges that different communities feel the effects of the climate crisis differently, and that the responsibility for the crisis lies with some countries and companies more than others. It understands that the lives of those already facing injustice and oppression are made harder by the impacts of the climate crisis.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Economic justice is about making sure that the benefits of economic growth go to everyone, not just those at the top of society. Everyone should not only be able to access to basic needs for survival, such as healthcare, food and housing, but should also be able to thrive.

The economy should serve society, not the other way round. This means that the economy should be increasing the share of national income that goes to wages rather than profits, so that everyone prospers and no one gains excess wealth at the expense of others. This directly contrasts capitalist ideologies that claim that those at the top need to be disproportionately rewarded as 'wealth creators'.

APPENDIX

INVESTMENTS

- [NUS Campaign guide](#)
- [Template email to your VC](#)
- [Fossil Free Scorecards](#)
- [Freedom of Information](#)
- [Invest for Change](#)
- [University Research Database](#)

COUNCILS

- [UK Divest resources centre](#)
- [Find your local council](#)
- [Influencing Local Government](#)
- [Anti-Gentrification Handbook](#)
- [Community Right to Challenge](#)

OTHERS

- [NUS Decolonise Education](#)
- [SOS UK website](#)
- [People & Planet website](#)

BANKS

- [Banking with who?](#)
- [Switch your bank account](#)
- [Banking on Climate Change](#)
- [War on Want](#)
- [Ethical Consumers](#)
- [Bank Track](#)

CAREERS

- [Fossil free careers motion](#)
- [Ban BAE motion](#)
- [Fossil free careers petition](#)
- [Disrupting arms company recruitment](#)



NUS Decolonise Education - 2020/2022



national union of **students** in partnership with...



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