

Declaring a Climate Emergency. Green New Deal for FE and HE

A 'composite' proposal taken from submissions by

- ***Bath Students' Union***
- ***Goldsmiths Students' Union***
- ***Kingston Students' Union***
- ***Sheffield College Students' Union***

Summary

The climate crisis is the greatest issue of our time. Extreme weather events are on the increase and those who have done the least to cause climate change are bearing the brunt of the impact. The past year has seen mounting public concern and action on climate, ranging from the school strikes to widespread protest.

We call on the UK further and higher education system to undertake rapid reforms to reduce carbon emissions and to ensure students are prepared for a future which will be drastically impacted by the climate crisis. Rather than simply declaring 'climate emergencies' and carrying on business as usual, we want to see wide-reaching reforms across FE and HE in response to the crisis.

What's the problem?

The Climate Crisis poses an existential threat to the human race ¹

The Climate Crisis is a class issue which will affect the poorest and most vulnerable across the globe the most, despite the biggest contributions to the globe's CO2 emissions being produced by western countries.²

Since 2019, India has seen the wettest monsoon season killing 1750 people, Australia experienced apocalyptic fires that killed over a billion animals, the UK had its hottest day on record at 38.7 degrees celsius, and these freak weather events are increasing in frequency³

The 2018 IPCC report evidenced that our climate is currently already 1 degree hotter than pre-industrial levels, and we only have 12 years to put in sufficient work to ensure that the increase stays below 1.5 degrees.⁴

¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/environment-and-conservation/2019/11/climate-change-driving-entire-planet-to-dangerous-tipping>

² <https://medium.com/radical-urbanist/climate-change-is-a-class-issue-cd6c143d38f6>

³ <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/eye-of-the-storm/the-top-10-weather-and-climate-stories-of-2019/>
<https://www.wwf.org.au/get-involved/bushfire-emergency>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report>

The Earth's climate has changed throughout history and the effects of this are everywhere. From extreme weather, shrinking ice caps to sea levels rising to name a few of the effects.

More and more young people are trying to actively change the products they use to lower their carbon footprint and become more sustainable.

Organisations, businesses and charities can do much more to change the way they work into being more sustainable.

Many FE institutions don't have the resources or scrutiny to support their procedures, building, departments and students to become sustainable and often large campaigns about divestment cut of FE student unions and associations from getting involved

Sustainability is an ideal state where human activity does not degrade the environment, but maintains natural systems and resources for future generations.

Students who are more actively involved with sustainability and community projects are more likely to take their skills out into their community and workplace and continue to make positive change.

Campaigns that work for HE institutions are often difficult to rollout in to FE with FE needing bespoke campaigns.

There are a number of different organisations that NUS can working with to help student unions tackle climate change and in particular support FE institutions to become greener and more sustainable.

Institutions may use 'eco-anxiety' as a veiled attempt to avoid teaching and learning about the climate crisis. We know that the best response, instead, is to enable students to take action and develop their political agency.

SOS-UK is currently working with UCU to design a 'model' FE and HE Green New Deal which can be used by students' unions and local UCU branches to pressure institutions to make wide-reaching reforms to make strides toward the sector being carbon neutral by 2030.

This is inspired by the enormous success of the Green New Deal brought forward by joint campaigning by staff and students at Goldsmiths University. As with the Goldsmiths example, the Green New Deal 'model claim' will encompass teaching, learning, and research; operations, including catering, travel, energy, and investments; and broader commitments to carbon neutrality by 2030.

As students' unions take greater action on sustainability, the role of Environment and Ethics, or Sustainability, or similar, Part-Time Officers becomes ever more important. As PTOs these roles often receive little training and support.

Young people have always been at the forefront of large scale social change and climate change is no different as evidenced by the profile of Greta Thunberg and prevalence of school climate strikes all over the world.

NUS therefore is in a perfect position to be able to mobilise young people to lead the conversation on the Climate Crisis and coordinate activity that gives ourselves the best chance to conserve and save our planet.

When students lead, society follows and our communities benefit. It's time for NUS to put the climate emergency at its core and to demonstrate the leadership we need.

What could be the solution?

- NUS to declare a climate emergency and urge members and other sector organisations to do the same
- Demonstrate commitment and leadership we wish to see across the education and union sectors.
- Recognise the negative impact of the climate crisis on students' mental health and wellbeing, termed eco-anxiety.
- Campaign for a Green New Deal in universities and colleges – the Green New Deal, a concept originated in the USA inspired by Roosevelt's New Deal, outlines a package of policy reforms designed to tackle the climate crisis and income inequality
- The HE and FE sectors should become carbon neutral and divert from fossil fuels
- Environment and Ethics Officers should receive more training and support in their roles – in the lead-up to COP26, having a network of skilled student organisers will be key in leading student action on campus and across the UK.
- Lobby the government for greater funding for colleges to use to develop greener practices.
- Support for FE unions and associations to develop and plan effective sustainability campaigns and policies.
- Highlight and celebrate sustainability campaigns that occur across the UK that students and their unions are doing around the climate emergency
- The Government should launch a carbon neutrality fund that Universities, SUs and other organisations can access to facilitate their ambitions to become carbon neutral
- OfS should incorporate regulatory expectations around sustainable practice and operations in universities

Ideas for implementation

At the same time as the declaration, NUS will publish a detailed plan outlining how it plans to be carbon neutral by 2030.

There has been increased concern across the sector about this issue (the impact on mental health) and so, through SOS-UK, NUS will commission research into the underlying cause of such anxiety and propose solutions.

Work with partners like SOS-UK and UCU to campaign for universities and colleges to adopt their own Green New Deal.

Net-Zero Carbon Campaign

NUS will convene a group of students and elected officers, through SOS-UK, to lead a climate emergency campaign. This group will research and publish every university and college's carbon reduction plans and compare them like for like.

SOS-UK will support student campaigners and officers and laggard institutions to call for their institutions to commit to being net-zero by 2030.

This group will push institutions to implement plans that will take meaningful action in the face of the climate crisis. Institutions will be challenged to include campus operations, curriculum and research, investments, and landholdings. Traditionally carbon management plans include only campus operations, so this will extend the scope to fully cover institutions' impact.

This will include a continuation of the campaign for divestment from fossil fuels. In January, SOS-UK, in partnership with People and Planet, celebrated half of all UK universities having divested. This has shifted the narrative – universities that have yet to divest are now laggards in the face of the climate crisis. Through the net-zero carbon campaign, SOS-UK will support students and officers to campaign for more ethical re-investment and local off-setting solutions through land-use.

Through this work, we will hold institutions accountable to their 'climate emergency' declarations, ensuring that institutions cannot continue business as usual.

We call on SOS-UK to deliver an intensive summer training programme for such roles. This training will focus on the key campaigns for the year ahead and help to upskill these individuals to be effective campaigners. It will also establish a network for such officers and ensure they have access to the necessary peer-to-peer support.

Work with BUCS to improve the sustainability of travel to sport tournaments both in terms of mode of transport and geographic location relative to competitors

Work with SOS UK to develop a Carbon Rating system for the products SUS purchase through its consortium so students and students' unions can visibly see the carbon impact of products

Ensure that sustainability is embedded within each of the NUS UK training events for students and students' unions, such as Lead & Change and FFestival.

Work with colleagues in SOS UK to ensure that our members in further education are placed central to thinking and strategy and that they can easily access training opportunities and support

DPC Notes

This proposal is perhaps the one that the DPC have made the most interventions on because of the number of submissions received on the topic. The proposers are encouraged to review this merged proposal and speak to the DPC if they consider that intentions from their proposals are missing. If the proposers are happy with the text they will be named as co-sponsors of the proposal

Three submissions were received on this subject. There was a joint proposal from Kingston SU and Goldsmiths SU, plus proposals from Bath Spa SU and from Sheffield College. As these all covered similar issues regarding students taking action on climate change they were merged into one Policy Proposal. A number of the clauses in the three individual submissions were duplicated within the merged proposal and therefore some were removed to avoid repetition.

In addition, a number of the proposed solutions asked for specific actions to take this proposal forward. Whilst conference can give a strong steer to the FTO team and Boards in how to implement this policy, it is their responsibility to deliver. Therefore these ideas have been placed in a separate section to make this clear.

Two proposals were received covering specific areas of climate action and sustainability. One from Aston SU on waste disposal in student accommodation and another from Strathclyde SU on Food Waste. These were considered by DPC to be on the same subject, but of specific enough issues to be classed as amendments.

Sub-proposals

These are policy proposals which have been submitted on this theme. These would have been considered as amendments to the main proposal, however as we have moved the votes and discussion online the DPC has decided to make these separate votes on the subject, to help set the direction of future officer's work. So the below proposals will be considered separately rather than as 'amendments' to the main proposal.

Sub-proposal 1: Sustainable waste disposal within student accommodations

Submitted by: Aston Students' Union

What's the problem?

Approximately 70% of full-time first year students live in student accommodation of some sort across the UK[1]. Many of these student accommodation providers do not make recycling accessible for students. With thousands of students living in student accommodation, it is important that we encourage accommodation providers to recycle student waste in an efficient manner.

With student Groups across the country campaigning for the future of our planet and with many Students' Unions declaring a climate emergency, it is important for the NUS to support the movement.

According to the National Geographic, 91% of plastic is not recycled. The NUS should be encouraging students' to recycle as a first step to saving the planet by ensuring that the waste infrastructure of student accommodations enables the residents to practise these behaviours[2].

For many living in student accommodation, this is the first time students will be responsible for their own waste and it is important to provide both the students and the accommodation providers with the tools to reduce their waste and promote sustainability

Moving out to university is a key transition period in many young people's lives, so it is important that their new environment supports them in becoming conscientious and responsible citizens.

Private student accommodation companies are driven by profit, but form a critical part of many new & returning students' experience; accommodation companies should be more aware of the social impact of their practices.

What could be the solution?

Student accommodation providers should not only meet standard waste practices but actively encourage and enable students to recycle effectively.

Using the expertise of organisations such as People & Planet to develop tool kits for students' unions to educate students.

Sub-proposal 2: Combatting Food Waste

Submitted by: Strathclyde Students' Union

What's the Problem?

Around 10 million tonnes of food and drink were wasted in the UK in 2019[1].

A significant portion of this waste (around 15%) is generated in the hospitality industry¹, including Students' Union facilities.

Around 70% of food waste is generated in households, including by students.

Globally, the 1.3 billion tons of food loss and waste creates 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Decaying food waste releases methane, which has much higher impact as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide[2]. The build-up of

greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is currently a major contributor to the ongoing climate disaster.

That around 10% of people over 15 years old in the UK report experiencing a struggle to get enough food to eat³ – one of the worst rates in Europe.

Student food sharing initiatives such as the Strathclyde Foodsharing Society have proved to be an effective way to provide access to food for disadvantaged students, as well as working to create links with local communities.

Foodbanks, composting initiatives, and food-sharing also have the added benefit of reducing amounts of food sent to landfill.

What's could be the solution?

Students' Unions to develop ways to minimise food waste at their facilities.

Student' Unions should raise awareness among students of the issue of food waste, and to educate students on techniques for minimising personal food waste and proper food waste disposal.

Support for Students' Union food waste schemes such as food banks, food-sharing societies, and composting initiative, and help raise awareness among students of these provisions.

There should be foodbank provisions with easy access from university student accommodation.

Developing and a set of achievable waste targets for Students' Unions to work towards.

Ensuring the student movement reviews its commercial supply chain to ensure food waste is minimised.