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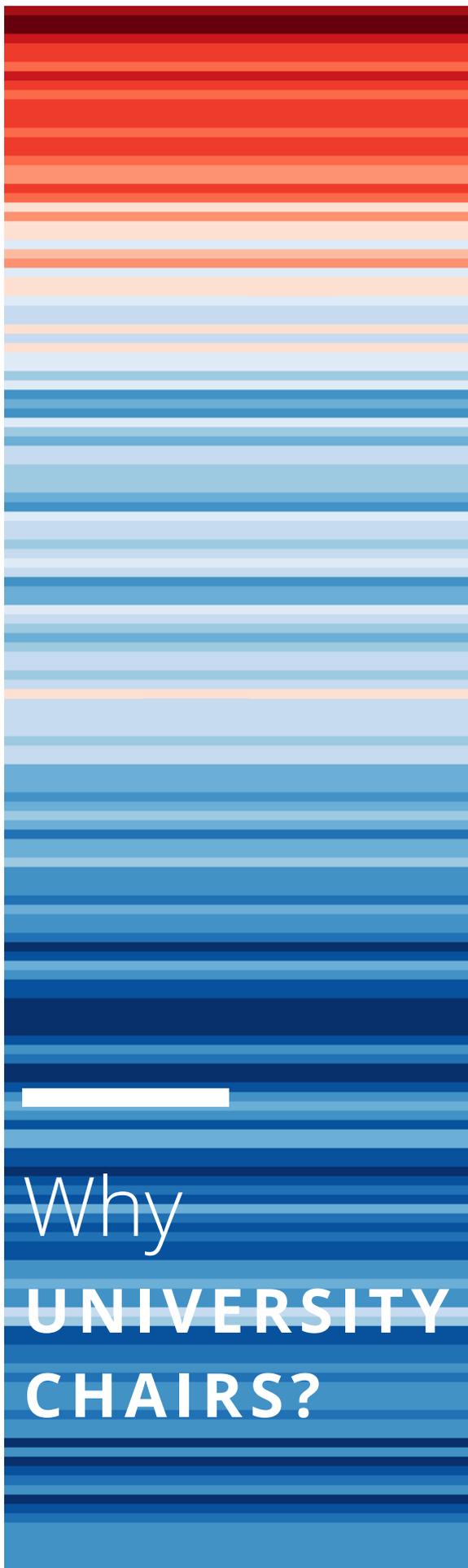
Committee of University Chairs

CLIMATE ACTION FOR UNIVERSITY CHAIRS



Distinction and Diversity
in Higher Education





Wherever your institution is on its Higher Education journey, be it measured in years or centuries, our roles as Board, Court or Council members, are critical in enabling the changes we need in order to address climate and natural world change. Only in so doing will we enable the world to thrive comfortably into the years ahead.

The tension between progression and regression is evident at every level. Climate preservation might appear to involve the giving up of freedoms, which some might feel hard won. There-in lies the opportunity for leaders at Board, Court or Council level : the ability to rise above this attachment to 'freedoms', and make suggestions with the clarity of perspective and degree of detachment, that offer the ultimate freedom - a future free of fear for survival.

Some of us have had careers more interwoven with the natural world than others, or been afforded insight to sustainable living through our own interests or historical perspective. For others this is new, and their fresh imagination can widen the range of solutions even further. We have one thing in common. Whilst it is easy to assign responsibility to others – governments, business, institutions, leaders etc. – it is individuals, who must enact and lead the changes.

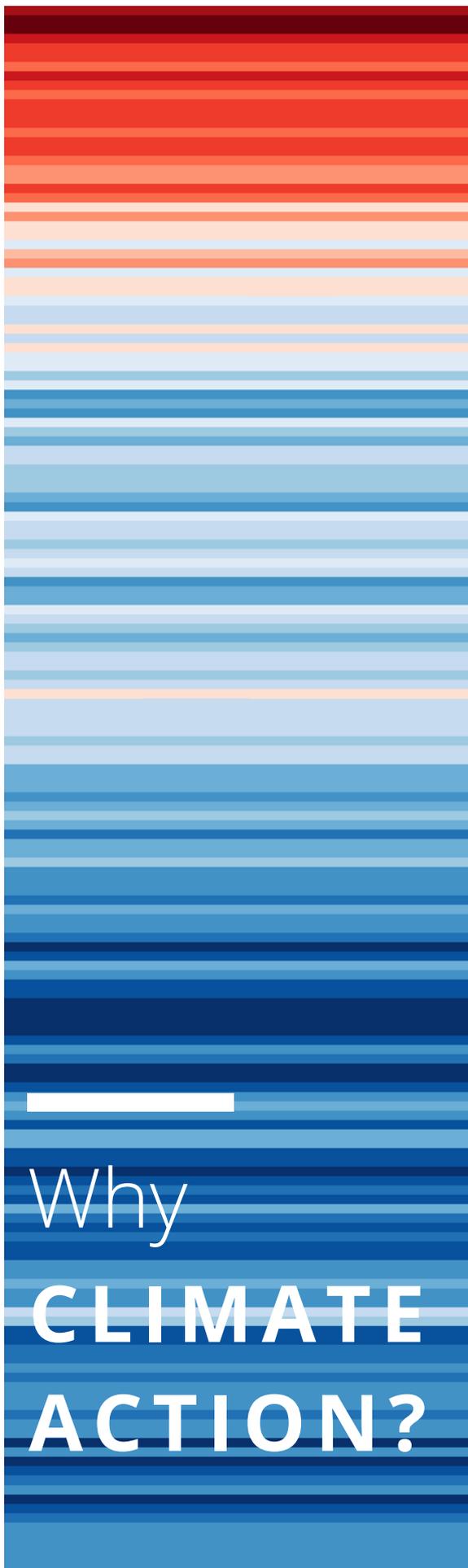
I would draw your attention to pages 6 & 7 of this paper to spark your own questions and actions as a non-executive. The EAUC is conscious that there is no preserve on good actions nor on good ideas, so there is also a link* via which you can share your own too. Collectively we can create a sector that responds more rapidly, and more thoroughly. There is no race against each other. Only a race together. One which we all must win.

Elizabeth Passey - Convener, The University of Glasgow
Convener, The Committee of Scottish University Chairs
***Email us at info@eauc.org.uk**

Left: Global average temperature bars from 1850 to 2018 (top).

Why

UNIVERSITY
CHAIRS?



UK universities, the communities that form them, and the communities they are a part of, will experience increasingly significant climatic changes.

Despite being the 7th largest world economy and ranked 13th out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2020), the UK is not immune from the effects of human-induced climate change. [The Committee on Climate Change](#) (CCC 2020) recognises that:

- the UK has already experienced 1.2C of warming compared to pre-industrial levels (vs global average increase of 1.1C);
- the UK has already experienced a mean sea-level rise of 16cm since 1900;
- There is now a 10-25% chance each year of UK heatwaves compared to a <10% chance each year 30 years ago.

Based on the latest research from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the UK's Met Office, the CCC (2020) also recognises that under most global emissions pathways it is likely to be inevitable that the UK will experience:

- a further 0.6C of warming by the mid-2050s;
- between 3 - 37cm further sea-level rise by 2060;
- a 10% increase in UK heavy rainfall compared to present by 2050;
- a 50% chance each year of a heatwave by 2050.

The CCC's Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk (June 2021) highlights that nationally the gap between the level of risk we face and the level of adaptation underway has widened and that acting now will be cheaper than waiting to deal with the consequences.

Left: Global average temperature bars from 1850 to 2018 (top).

Why

CLIMATE
ACTION?



SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONS ARE SUCCESSFUL INSTITUTIONS

Drivers for Climate Action

The drivers for environmental sustainability, and in particularly action on climate change, can be summarised within two categories: ***Institutional Risk*** and ***Strategic Opportunities***.

Institutional Risk

Climate change is a Board-level risk that needs mitigating. Risks to the functioning of the institution include:

- **Rising operating and capital costs** - associated with increasing energy prices; damage to estates due to severe weather events; future estates and operations adaptation; increasing costs of carbon offset prices; and disruption to business continuity.
- **Reputational damage** - inaction or limited climate action is increasingly being seen by key strategic stakeholders as a partnership risk and/or not aligning with their own core values. Institutions not mitigating climate risks are becoming increasingly isolated.
- **Student and Staff Recruitment** - students and staff are increasingly concerned about the effects of climate change and seek places of study and employment that align to their values. Institutions that do not address climate risks will be less competitive in recruiting the best student and staff talent, both with financial consequences.
- **Prosecution** - it is increasingly likely that the governments of devolved nations will set public bodies expected levels of emissions reductions as they aim to meet national net-zero targets.

Climate Action = Institutional Resilience

Strategic Opportunities

Whilst climate change presents a number of risks to the functioning of an institution, action to address climate change also presents strategic opportunities.

These include:

- **Partnerships** - in order to achieve net zero emission targets at all scales, partnerships between organisations are crucial. Taking strong early action on climate change will signal to external organisations and leaders your core values and attract external engagement. This will create a better-connected institution, produce increased knowledge-exchange and create potential income generation.
- **Funding and Income - Student and Staff Recruitment** - increasingly current and prospective students are looking to sustainability league tables to inform decision making of where to study next, including [THE Impact Rankings](#) and [Carbon Targets](#). [Research by SOS-UK](#) (2021) highlights that 90% of students are very or fairly concerned about climate change (vs. [80% BEIS public attitudes tracker](#)) and 91% of students agree their place of study should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development. Staff are also increasingly seeking places of work that align to their values. By taking a lead on climate action institutions are better placed to attract students and staff, leading to improved organisational talent retention and income generation.
- **Funding and Income - Research Grants** - funding bodies are increasingly looking at how to reduce the environmental impact of funded research projects. For example, the [Wellcome Trust](#) now requires all grant holders to determine business travel emissions for funded projects and offset these emissions in line with an institutional or department offsetting strategy. This trend is expected to continue and development. Institutions that demonstrate clear commitments and actions on climate change will be more competitively placed when applying for research grant funding.
- **Social and Economic Relevance** - institutions that can demonstrate holistically that their learning, teaching and research delivers the green-skilled graduates and knowledge needed to deliver a net zero world enhances the social and economic relevance and value of the institution and the employability of its students.

Climate Action = Prosperous Institutions



Climate Action: Future-proofing your institution

Actions your Board and Senior Management Team can take:

Below is a list of suggested climate actions Boards of universities can take to mitigate and adapt to climate change and improve the institution's resilience.

Action: Governors and SMT to set institutional ambition and Net Zero strategy

- Governors and SMT set challenging emission reduction targets - sign the [Race to Zero for Universities and Colleges](#) and the [SDG Accord](#), and publicise your commitments and values.

Action: Governors and SMT to commission extensive stakeholder engagement

- To meet national emission targets, the [Committee on Climate Change](#) forecasts that approximately 62% of emissions reductions will wholly or partly include behaviour change. A whole-institutional approach to climate change and climate action is required to meet targets and ensure everyone has a voice in the process. Ensure strategy development and operational planning is transparent and co-created.

Action: Governors and SMT to develop offsetting strategy

- Governors and SMT develop and publish an institutional offsetting strategy within or alongside their Net Zero strategy. See the COP26 Universities Network [Briefing Paper on Sector Offsetting](#) for guidance in developing your strategy.

Action: Governors and SMT to regularly publish progress

- Governors and SMT annually publish publically-available sustainability reports, including progress towards emissions targets and catch-up actions if targets are not met. Ensure reporting is easily accessible, engaging and transparent.

Action: Improve sustainability knowledge within your Board and SMT

- As part of your Net Zero Emissions Strategy, Governors and SMT complete dedicated sustainability training, such as [Carbon Literacy Training for Senior Management and Leadership](#), to improve knowledge and understanding of how sustainability will impact across all institutional operations. EAUC can deliver this training for you.

Action: Governors and SMT to review financial arrangements (banking and investments)

- Governors and SMT to review financial investment portfolios and day-to-day banking operations to reduce exposure to fossil fuel investments and support socially-beneficial investments. Ensure investment managers use votes on company boards to promote sustainable development.

Action: Governors and SMT to commission mapping of teaching content and graduate skills development

- Governors and SMT to action an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) mapping exercise to determine where, and to what extent, teaching, learning and research includes climate and sustainable development knowledge and skills within its delivery. Using findings, commission an action plan to embed sustainability within all teaching programmes and link graduate attributes with ESD skills. The latest [ESD Guidance launched by QAA and Advance HE \(2021\)](#), is intended support UK higher education institutions incorporate ESD within their curricula.

Action: Governors and SMT to commission estates energy systems audit

- Governors and SMT to commission an estates energy audit to determine the structural changes and campus adaptation required to achieve net zero emissions targets and the capital investment needed. Ensure adequate continuous improvement of the estate to avoid future inflated costs.

Please share your examples with us at info@eauc.org.uk



SPOTLIGHT ON: CLIMATE ACTION TOOLKIT FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

The first of its kind, the [Climate Action Toolkit for the Higher Education Sector](#) was launched at the UUK sustainability conference in February 2021. The toolkit identifies HE-specific critical elements Vice-Chancellors and Governors should consider in order to advance sustainability and respond to the climate crisis.

Under five core themes - Leadership and Governance; Community Engagement; Research and Knowledge Exchange; Teaching; and Campus Management - headline actions are divided into manageable steps, with signposting to relevant resources and case-studies highlighted underneath.

The critical elements identified in the toolkit will support universities to:

- Prepare staff and students to cope, thrive and move responsibly in a changing world, for example equip students with employable skills
- Protect biodiversity
- Work toward climate and social justice
- Lower and eliminate scope 1, 2 and 3 greenhouse gas emissions



LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

2 SUGGESTED STEPS

3 | SMT to incorporate climate emergency actions into management and governance arrangements

- Appoint a sustainability champion on your SMT and on the board of governors to ensure this agenda is actively promoted
- Ensure climate action is a standing agenda item at appropriate board and committees meetings to ensure regular and consistent consideration and action
- Access sustainability training for board of governors and SMT
- Invite student sustainability leaders to present at board and committee meetings
- Review policies and strategy to identify conflicts with climate action

3 RESOURCES

Watch the Climate Commission's discussion with governors and chairs on board level climate action [here](#)

Read EAUC's [Sustainability Guide for Governors](#)

Take part in EAUC's [Leadership Lab](#)

[Read here](#) about the University of the West of England's Board of Governors declaring a climate emergency and committing to providing climate action leadership

Above: Climate Action Toolkit for the Higher Education Sector (cover)

Right: Illustrative formatting of theme, headline action, steps and relevant resources.



Additional resources can be accessed via the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education's [HE Climate Action Toolkit](#).

Do you have student governor actions in your institution you would like to showcase? Share it with EAUC at info@eauc.org.uk