

# Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education: Findings to Date

September 2020



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# About the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education

The Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education is a unique partnership between Association of Colleges, EAUC - the Alliance for Sustainability Leader in Education, GuildHE and Universities UK launched in November 2019. The Commission is working to coordinate a clear, cohesive and consistent response to the climate emergency for the further and higher education sector by the end of 2020. With 5 million staff and students, the further and higher education sector comprises around 7.7% of the UK population; a coordinated response to the climate emergency will amplify our voice and impact in tackling the climate crisis.

The Commission is led by four student and four institutional Commissioners guiding its work and acting as the fact of the initiative. Commissioners are supported by a council of 85, including students and university and college vice-chancellors and principals. EAUC provides the secretariat function.

For more information, please visit [www.eauc.org.uk/climate\\_commission](http://www.eauc.org.uk/climate_commission).

## Commissioners

### Institutional Leaders

- **Steve Frampton MBE**, AoC President & AoC representative
- **Professor James Longhurst**, Assistant Vice Chancellor, University of the West of England & EAUC representative
- **Professor Joy Carter CBE DL**, Vice Chancellor, University of Winchester & GuildHE representative
- **Professor Judith Petts CBE**, Vice Chancellor, University of Plymouth & UUK representative

### Student Leaders

- **Amy Brazier**, Student, Portsmouth College, AoC representatives
- **Manveer Gill**, Undergraduate, University of Warwick & EAUC representative
- **Marta Crispo**, PhD Researcher, Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures, University of Sheffield, UUK representative
- **Florence Barrett**, Undergraduate, Plymouth Marjon University, GuildHE representative

## Steering Group

- **Ian Munro**, Director, Association of Colleges
- **Iain Patton**, CEO, EAUC
- **Fiona Goodwin**, Director of Operations & Planning, EAUC
- **Alex Bols**, Deputy Chief Executive, GuildHE
- **Christopher Hale**, Director of Policy, Universities UK
- **Sonya Peres**, Climate Commission Officer, EAUC

# Executive Summary

Between March and June 2020, the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education held five **evidence gathering events**. At the events, expert witnesses provided insight on our five priorities to inform our outputs and ensure they are effective and relevant to the sector's needs.

We are delighted to now share some of our synthesised findings with the UK government, the higher and further education sector and the wider public.

Our findings suggest next steps, weaving in government policy as well as challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19. We will also use our findings to further engage stakeholders on our work.

Please note, our findings and next steps are dynamic, responding and adapting to new information and circumstances.

Below is an outline of the 5 priorities upon which our work is centred and a summary of findings.

# 1

**Mobilising the further and higher education voice** - for impact and influence

We need: widespread climate action across the sector to maintain our trusted position in society.

# 2

**Research and innovation** – the funding and scope of research and innovation and maximising its impact

We need: deeper understanding of the extent of climate research and a coordinated voice on climate action.

# 3

**Measuring and Reporting Scope 1, 2 and 3 greenhouse gas emissions**

We need: more comprehensive reporting that is transparent and accessible to students.

# 4

**Deep adaptation** – including governance, risk, mitigation and adaptation for the future of our campuses and operations

We need: to prepare students and staff emotionally and physically for the consequences of a changing climate.

# 5

**Education and the student experience** – curriculum development and the climate emergency

We need: to co-create a curriculum with students that prepares learners for a changing future.

The Climate Commission is a dynamic initiative, adapting its work quickly to new information and changing circumstances to effectively push and coordinate the sector to take climate action. Please note, our findings are subject to change.

# Executive Summary

Our findings suggest next steps to coordinate climate action in the further and higher education sector.

The Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education will be publishing a document to communicate its outputs by October 2020.

Below is an outline of the actions stakeholders in the sector can take, corresponding with our summarised findings.

## Students

As students, you can continue pushing your institutions to take climate action. You can hold your institution accountable and ensure transparency by asking for comprehensive carbon reporting and sustainability strategies.

Click [here](#) to visit our student hub to learn how you can get involved.

Click [here](#) to view your UK institution's sustainability commitments.

## Institutions

As we face the impacts of COVID-19, the Commission's work aims to support you in emerging from the pandemic sustainably, to also tackle the climate crisis.

You can help your institution play its role in coordinated climate action while emerging from COVID-19 by continuing to engage with the Climate Commission's events and upcoming outputs

Click [here](#) to visit our website to learn how your institution can get involved.

Click [here](#) to register for our November 5th event, Climate Commission: One Year On.

## Government

Engage with the Commission's findings and events to learn more about how universities and colleges can be supported to take climate action.

Click [here](#) to visit our website to learn how you can get involved.

Click [here](#) to register for our November 5th event, Climate Commission: One Year On.



# The Commission's Work to date in Numbers

November 2019 - July 2020

The Commission has been working to engage our partners' members, as well as stakeholders within and outside of the sector. We will be using our findings as a basis to continue strong stakeholder engagement.

13

Online Events

61

Expert Witnesses  
informing our Work

12

Colleges contributing to  
the development of the  
FE Climate Action  
Roadmap

41

Students Contributing to our  
UNESCO Futures of Education  
Report

550

Event Sign-Ups

5

Outputs being developed by the  
Commission

4

Institutional  
Commissioners leading the  
Commission

85

Council Members advising  
the Commission

4

Student Commissioners  
leading the Commission

4

## 2019 November

The Climate Commission is launched at Ravenbourne University London. The Commission announces its aim to produce strategic, sector-wide outputs to respond to the climate emergency by COP26 in Glasgow. The event sees students, Vice Chancellors and Principals from across the UK come together to review the deliverables and outcomes for the Commission and the year long action plan. the Rt. Hon. Lord Deben, Chair of the Committee on Climate Change, delivers a keynote speech.

## 2020 March - June

The Commission holds 5 [evidence gathering events](#) for each priority. Expert witnesses, sector and government bodies, students and university and college staff come together to discuss the sector's needs in relation to the 5 priorities, informing the Commission's work.

The Climate Commission publishes a [statement](#) on offsetting carbon emissions, developed with advice from the Climate Commission Council.

COP26, initially meant to take place in November 2020, is postponed until November 2021 due to COVID-19. The Commission releases a [statement](#) acknowledging the importance of reducing the severity of the outbreak and emphasising its continued commitment to tackling the climate crisis. The Commission commits to still sharing some of its work by the end of 2020.

## Timeline of the Commission's work (Subject to change)

### 2020 January

The Climate Commission produces a target [statement](#) facilitating a clear pathway to net-zero emissions, as well as identifies 5 priority areas on which its work will focus.

### 2020 July

The Commission begins interpreting discussions from the Evidence Gathering Events to inform its outputs.

Work on producing outputs is now underway. The outputs are reviewed and occasionally adapted as new information is learned and circumstances change.

The Commission releases the [FE Climate Action Roadmap](#) to positive feedback.

The Commission hosts a student-led event, "[Discussion with the Further Education Sector](#)" to ensure its work is relevant and beneficial to the sector.

## 2020 September

The Commission hosts "Discussion with Further and Higher Education Governors and Chairs" in partnership with Association of Colleges and Committee of University Chairs. The purpose of the event is to share the Commission's work thus far with the sector, and ensure it is relevant and beneficial to the sector's decision-making bodies.

The Commission releases a [report](#) for UNESCO featuring the insights of 41 UK students on the future of education amid the climate crisis. The report will contribute to UNESCO's work on global education policy.

The Commission works with the Climate Commission Council to finalise its outputs, including workshopping an HE Climate Action Toolkit, at an online [event](#) on October 28th.

## 2021 January - October

The Commission advances dialogue with the Climate Commission Council and sector bodies, ensuring the sector and the wider public is updated and aware of its work.

Outputs are updated and improved upon.

## Timeline of the Commission's work continued

(Subject to change)

## 2020 November

The Commission presents its work thus far at "Climate Commission: One Year On" [event](#). The Rt. Hon. Lord Deben returns to give a keynote speech, alongside other speakers.

More of the Commission's work is showcased and discussed at EAUC's Global Climate conference.

## 2021 November

The Commission presents its work at COP26 in Glasgow.

# Key Findings from the Evidence Gathering Events

The Evidence Gathering Events have been crucial in coordinating climate action that is considerate of and relevant to the sector's needs and priorities, particularly as COVID-19 poses unprecedented challenges to UK universities and colleges.

The following section summarises the Commission's findings and links them to government activity and current affairs. Read more about the Evidence Gathering Events and how you can get involved here.

## 1

### Mobilising the Further and Higher Education Sector Voice

The further and higher education sector is a trusted sector in society. The sector's recent academic contributions and community support during the COVID-19 crisis have deepened this trust. We should mobilise our voice to strengthen the impact of our response to the climate emergency by continuing to work to earn trust and cement credibility amongst students, local and national governments and the wider public. The sector can do this by making widespread changes to advance sustainability across all areas of its operations and working collaboratively with external and local partners including regional climate action groups.

Universities and colleges play a key role in providing the evidence base for the climate emergency while also identifying the impact and mitigation of our research processes. To move forward, we need a clear understanding of the extent of climate research in the UK and how these findings are disseminated and used to influence policy and the wider public.

COVID-19 has shown the vital importance UK researchers and academics have in understanding, and providing solutions to global and national challenges. In the July 2020 [Research & Development Roadmap](#), the UK government addresses the critical role of research in realising its commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. The Roadmap lays out actions to investing in research in technologies including carbon capture and storage as well as research into nature-based solutions to the climate crisis. We must see continued investment in UK research, and increased investment in multidisciplinary climate research.

### Research & Innovation

## 2



Reporting and measuring scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions that institutions directly and indirectly emit is imperative to climate action. Expert witnesses emphasised that it is crucial to ensure scope 3 emissions are measured and reported alongside scope 1 and 2 emissions, as they provide a more truthful, realistic depiction of the sector’s emissions and our opportunities to improve climate action. If we do not report scope 3 emissions alongside scope 1 and 2, our response to the emergency will be incomplete. The sector must also ensure that GHG emissions data is made accessible to ensure transparency and to allow students and the public to hold institutions accountable.

# 3

## Measuring & Reporting Scope 1, 2 and 3 Emissions

The COVID-19 lockdown saw a temporary reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions. But as we recover from the pandemic, we must ensure we do not increase the threat of climate change through locked-in higher emissions.

In a letter to the government on 6 principles to "Building a resilient recovery from the COVID-19 crisis," the Committee on Climate Change recommends making investments for a recovery that are resilient to climate change and do not increase greenhouse gas emissions. The further and higher education must also follow this recommendation and can more accurately ensure its adherence through improved measuring and reporting of emissions.

The onset of COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for resilient and adaptable societies, economies and institutions. As we emerge from the pandemic, the climate crisis will continue to loom large. We need to ensure the sector is prepared for a changing world.

Universities and colleges need to consider deep adaptation, meaning preparing for negative, impacts of climate change on individuals and society. To support the sector a toolkit needs to be provided to encourage and enable honest and clear discussions amongst groups of students, staff, senior management teams and board of governors. Mechanisms and resilience are crucial - both physical and psychological. Climate anxiety needs to be recognised and safety measures in place.

# 4

## Deep Adaptation



Climate and sustainability is not covered comprehensively enough across education and this can have consequences on the climate crisis as well as on the next generation's capacity to cope and adapt in a changing world . As curricula is mainly driven by qualification content/needs, it is key to influence professional bodies to fully embed climate education throughout the curricula for all students. Whilst there are excellent examples of student action and campaigning, this breadth and engagement of all students is needed to drive real change. Core curriculum change is required and needs to be part of funded entitlement for all learners. Students are to be at the heart of a co-created curriculum change.

# 5 Education and Student Experience

These findings support the UK government's position on developing a green economy as this economy can be propelled by students who are equipped with skills to ensure a sustainable future.

The College of the Future Commission is working to produce recommendations on the role of UK colleges in the future. Its interim [report](#) also emphasises the sector's responsibility to students and local economies to ensure they are equipped to thrive in the changing future. This includes knowledge and skills in sustainability.



# Get Involved

The Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education is a partnership between Association of Colleges, EAUC- The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership, GuildHE and Universities UK. We collaborate with institutions, individuals and organisations in the further and higher education sector.

We seek to ensure that the wide range of voices in the sector is heard, and the diverse needs, priorities and responsibilities of the sector's 5 million staff and students is reflected in our work. Throughout the year, we have hosted various events, discussions, focus groups and workshops to ensure the sector can feed into our work.

As the end of 2020 approaches, the Climate Commission will continue developing its outputs and holding events to coordinate climate action in the sector.

Please visit our website: [www.eauc.org.uk/climate\\_commission](http://www.eauc.org.uk/climate_commission) to learn how to get involved.



