

Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education Students & Leaders



COY16 Student Statement

This statement has been developed by the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education Student Commissioners with input and feedback from FE and HE students. This statement represents the views of the Student Commissioners and student signatories only. Students can add their signature [here](#).

Preamble and Introduction

Launched in November 2019, the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education is a partnership of Association of Colleges, EAUC, GuildHE and Universities UK. Four senior-level institutional commissioners and four student commissioners provide direction and leadership to the Commission's work, act as the visible face of the Commission and play a role in building engagement and consensus within the sectors involved. The Climate Commission works to draw together a strategic sector-wide approach to the climate emergency, through facilitating evidence-gathering sessions, consensus building, resource development and continued institutional support. The Student Climate Commissioners are making this COY16 Youth Statement alongside our Student Voice partner Enactus UK.

In 2019/20, there were 5.1 million students enrolled at colleges or universities within the UK, representing 7% of the [UK's total population](#) and 12% of its [economically active population](#) (defined ages 16 - 64) at that time. Research by SOS-UK ([Student Opinion: Climate Change 2021](#); [Sustainability Skills Survey 2019](#)) with over 9,000 student responses highlights that:

- 90% of students are very or fairly concerned about climate change (vs. 80% BEIS public attitudes tracker);
- 91% of students agree their place of study should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development;
- 83% of students would like to see sustainable development actively incorporated and promoted through all courses;
- 48% of students have not experienced problem solving through whole-systems approaches so far in their higher education.

Building from this, in September 2020 the Climate Commission facilitated four student workshops and developed our [Futures of Education report](#), which contributed to

UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative. Key insights coming from these workshops include student's recognition that:

- There is a generational gap in both awareness of the climate crisis and climate action. Whilst there was recognition of hope in the current young generation becoming new leaders and making the needed changes, it was also recognised that it is putting a lot of pressure on young people to be saviours. There cannot be a delay in educating people in positions of power to take action now.
- The trend of personalisation of climate change and the responsibility placed on individuals to take climate action is concerning. Whilst individual action can produce some impact, whole-system approaches and change is needed to achieve the required emissions reduction and wider sustainability goals.
- Education should have a broad purpose of preparing individuals of all ages to cope, adapt and thrive in a changing world. At present the education system is lacking in equipping learners with the knowledge and skill set to thrive in an uncertain world.

This COY16 Youth Statement represents the shared experiences and viewpoints of the Student Climate Commissioners, engaged UK college and university students as part of focus groups facilitated to inform this statement, and endorsement by wider college and university students through signatures.

Deserving a Voice

In 2019/20, 2.5 million [HE](#), 2.2m [FE England](#), 0.3m [FE Scotland](#), and 0.1m [FE Wales](#) students were enrolled in either a college or university within the UK. Our perspective is to support college and university students across the UK, at a high-level. A focus of ours is students working alongside institutional leaders. This emphasis on co-construction and collaboration is critical as a mechanism for systemic change driven by the most important stakeholders of education - the students themselves. By providing specific, accessible outputs as to how an institution can transition to net zero, we are supporting students to be able to channel their desire for change into actionable asks of their institution - asks which align with guidance that is being disseminated to institutional leaders. To date, the [Climate Commission has engaged with over 80 colleges and 44 universities in the UK](#) and is committed to continue discussions and supporting institutions to embed and lead on sustainability actions.

The Climate Commission also believes in the power of cross-sector collaboration. Colleges and universities have an incredible wealth of expertise which, when combined with the capacity and appetite of the student body to develop skills and experience, provides ample opportunities to support our institutions to develop climate leaders and transition to net zero. We want to emphasise this perspective.

In the ethos of cross-sector collaboration, we partner with 'Student Voice' organisations including Enactus UK, SOS International, People & Planet, Unloc, Future Leaders

Network, Student Hubs, Carbon Neutral University Network and Oikos International. This engagement helps broaden our engagement with students and capture more diverse student ideas, viewpoints and experiences.

Background and Rationale

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 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.

Adaptation Scotland ([2021](#)) has also provided an updated regional summary of the experienced changes in Scotland's climate and forecast changes. Both bodies illustrate the imperative of reducing global warming to 'well-below' 2C with a target of 1.5C. For example, the CCC forecast that under a scenario of keeping global warming 'well-below' 2C the UK annual average temperature will increase by approximately 0.7C from present by the mid 2080s - this compares to approximately 1.9C under current global emissions trends.

These changes will have significant repercussions, and whilst climate change itself is impartial, the risk and vulnerability to climate change experienced by UK citizens is not homogenous. It is clear that younger and future generations in the UK, as well as those across the world, are and will be forced to live in an increasingly destabilised climate, with both direct and indirect consequences to this. According to the National Life Tables ([Office for National Statistics 2020](#)) an 18-year old starting college or university this year can expect to live on average for another 60 years. The 2018 heatwave in the UK contributed to the deaths of 863 people in England ([Public Health England 2018](#)). Linking this to the CCC findings above, this is the level of severity of heatwave that is expected to be experienced in the UK by today's and tomorrow's students every other year by 2050 rather than every 4 - 10 years today.

In addition to direct health impacts, today's younger generation and future generations will be faced with wider impacts to their lives such as flooding and supply chain disruptions, including food supply disruptions and price volatility. Adaptation activities to address these impacts were highlighted as needing the highest priority over the next two years by the CCC's latest UK Climate Risk Independent Assessment (CCRA3; [CCC June 2021](#)). Within this, student housing remains a significant health and wellbeing issue both at present and increasingly so due to UK climate change. NUS's Homes Fit for Student report ([2019; 3rd Edition](#)) found students paid on average £502 per month for rooms in substandard housing stocks, with 44% of student renters having issues with damp and mould, 42% had draughty doors and windows, and 16% reporting electrical safety hazards. The study by Mossi and Genovese ([2018](#)) on UK students' experience of fuel poverty found that there has been no research to date focused explicitly on the experiences of the student population dealing with poor housing conditions. In their survey of University of Sheffield students they found that 42% of students in privately rented accommodation described their accommodation as 'too cold' during winter months. Students historically and presently remain frozen out of fuel poverty research as well as government policies to address poor housing stock which often require tenants to be in receipt of welfare support to be eligible for home improvement grants.

Beyond a generational imbalance in the impacts of climate change, we also recognise intersectionality and that multiple factors can contribute to a person's vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Black or ethnic minority students, students from lower-income backgrounds, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, and female students, are all at potentially greater risk of the effects of climate change. For example, 24% of young people experiencing homelessness in the UK identify as LGBTQ+ ([akt 2021](#)). In comparison, the Office for National Statistics ([2021](#)) found that 6.6% of young people identified as LGB in 2019. Social stigma, racism, reduced access to goods and services through discrimination or reduced economic means all contribute to increasing the risk and vulnerability of individuals and communities to climate change.

Issues and Gaps

National Further and Higher Education Governance Frameworks

Issue 1: Absence of mandatory college and university regulations for climate action and sustainable development

Despite the significant impacts climate change will increasingly have on today and tomorrow's students and graduates, presently UK colleges and universities are not required through regulation by devolved governments to wholly address the climate emergency through emission reporting, targets and reductions, climate adaptation, or ensuring students and graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to survive and thrive in an increasingly unstable world. This statement recognises that in Scotland colleges and universities are required to report institutional emissions annually to Scottish Government, with an expectation for targets for net-zero to be included in 2022 submissions; however, no other regulations are in place within the UK, and Scottish regulations do not set expectations for climate adaptation or Education for Sustainable Development.

Due to a lack of regulatory reporting frameworks for the sector specifically on climate action and disclosure, progress to date by UK colleges and universities as a sector has been limited, with significant divergence in positive impact between sector leaders and those failing to respond. In addition, a lack of consistency in emissions reporting methodology means that it is difficult for current and prospective students to determine the impact and progress to date on their institution's climate actions, to compare progress with other institutions or sector averages, and to hold their institution to account. The absence of regulatory reporting frameworks puts UK colleges and universities at risk of "Greenwashing" audiences without them taking the necessary steps to address the climate and ecological emergency. It is noted that this year a further 29 UK institutions failed to submit voluntary Environmental Management Reporting data to HESA compared to last year.

Issue 2: Absence of taught climate education within colleges, universities and communities

Whilst it is recognised that there are pockets of departmental and institutional best practice, at a national scale there is a significant absence of quality, relevant climate education for students to access within colleges and universities. As highlighted by SOS-UK's research ([Student Opinion: Climate Change 2021](#); [Sustainability Skills Survey 2019](#)), currently the vast majority of students do not have access to educational opportunities that will support them with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle the climate emergency and to adapt to a changing world, both socially and economically.

This absence within personal and professional development will have significant consequences. Firstly this will lead to difficulties for college and university graduates in

gaining sustainable careers, both within the sustainable development field itself as well as working within wider businesses as they shift to a low-carbon reality. Without action to address this, it will mean many students and graduates will increasingly require retraining to be able to contribute further to net-zero targets. Secondly, without proactively supporting students to develop the knowledge, skills and values needed to respond to the climate emergency on a personal level, the health and wellbeing of students is expected to suffer further as the impacts of climate change increase.

Linked to the absence of climate education is that teaching staff often have a lack of formal climate education and training themselves, leading to a lack of confidence and/or understanding of how sustainability actually fits into their course. This lack of training is part of a wider issue to do with a lack of funding nationally and institutionally for dedicated staff time and support, to equip them to teach about climate change. This is a significant contributing factor as to why students are currently unlikely to obtain sufficient knowledge and skills, despite learning about disciplines that have established links to climate change.

Many educational institutions do great work on climate action, and learn lessons accordingly. It is not currently possible to find a comprehensive, actively-updated list of initiatives and actions being taken, which could inspire institutions and those striving to push for change with best practice examples of how they could act. Without incentives for project and campaign leaders to collaborate or to contribute to the upkeep of such a directory, institutions risk functioning in silos and spend resources progressing inefficiently. A more collaborative approach to climate action across local and similar-sized universities would see marked improvement in outcomes.

Finally, there is a gap in the realised potential civic responsibility that institutions are providing to their local community. Whilst institutions support efforts to tackle the climate emergency through direct operations and research, there are limited efforts directed at supporting their immediate communities with this same issue. Providing student and researcher opportunities focusing on local issues, providing open and accessible climate education modules to all, supporting businesses with greenhouse gas emission accounting, working with local primary and secondary schools to enrich the educational experiences of all involved, and partnering with local businesses and industry on efforts related to climate action, are some ways institutions can improve civic responsibility and increase their social value.

Demands

Regulatory Actions: National Further and Higher Education Governance Frameworks

Demand 1 - Mandatory Emissions Reporting for all Colleges and Universities

The creation and implementation of an annual mandatory reporting framework for all colleges and universities, aligned with Greenhouse Gas Protocol methodology, including the inclusion of significant Scope 3 emissions sources within minimum reporting standards (e.g. business travel). Each institution should also be required to disclose institution emission reduction targets, including significant scope 3 sources, between now and their stated net-zero target date, and report on progress against these. If an institution does not currently have a net-zero strategy they should be required to develop and publish one that includes net-zero targets for scopes 1 and 2, and reduction targets for scope 3 emissions. Data for each institution should be publicly available in an accessible format for a non-technical audience.

Demand 2 - Mandatory Climate Education and Embedding of Education for Sustainable Development Within Curriculum

Requiring that colleges and universities provide all student and staff members the opportunity to engage with climate education at any point of their educational journey. Whilst embedding sustainability within core programme learning is desired and should be worked towards, a solution-orientated open course focused on climate change science, the impacts of climate change both globally and locally, and the actions individuals and the institution can and are taking should be a minimum.

Regulatory Actions: Housing

Demand 3 - Government Home Improvement Schemes To Be Based On Council Tax Bands and Provide Support For Students

Home energy and structural improvement schemes administered by Governments and energy companies to alleviate fuel poverty should be based on council tax bands and include enrollment in education as an eligibility criterion exclusive of individuals being in receipt of welfare support. This would acknowledge and act on the levels of fuel poverty experienced by the student community, as well as ensuring support reaches places and communities most in need and at risk from the increasing impacts of climate change.

Non-Regulatory Actions: Student Demands of Further and Higher Education Institutions and Wider Stakeholders

Demand 4 - Student Engagement in Sustainability Target Setting and Delivery

Institutions should proactively engage with their student and staff communities in the creation and delivery of institutional sustainability strategies, including through open and transparent consultation processes, and through Student Union / Student Association representation at all relevant committee structures. Annual funding should be available for student and staff-led sustainability initiatives to strengthen the institutional community involvement in and delivery of sustainability objectives.

Demand 5 - Improving Access to Education Through Technology

Ensure continued digital access to quality education and research, using the operational, teaching and research experiences gained over Covid-19 as a foundation. Improving the accessibility to study qualifications and complete research ensures further and higher education is more equitable and particularly supports individuals with multiple responsibilities or barriers to traditional educational practices. Furthermore, travel-related emissions (student and staff commuting, business and curriculum-related travel, and international student travel) form a significant source of institutional emissions. Actions to support widespread digital learning opportunities will reduce transport emissions and their negative environmental and social impacts.

Demand 6 - Capital Building Projects - Fabric-First and Passivhaus

Ensure that all capital building projects within institutions are led by 'fabric-first' principles. If new buildings are constructed, ensure that these are built to Passivhaus standards or equal. Both embodied and operational carbon emissions should be considered in building design, with the inclusion of a £100 per tonne of CO₂e 'offsetting cost' for scenario planning. This figure is currently being used by the University of St Andrews as a forecast for offsetting a tonne of CO₂e in 2030. This will provide a more realistic reflection of the long-term Business As Usual costs vs implementing sustainability investments during the design and construction phase. Capital projects should also create a net-gain for biodiversity onsite and support the provision of shaded greenspace for public use.

Demand 7 - Partnerships and Funding - Net Zero

This statement recognises that in order to achieve net-zero targets institutions face a significant financial challenge in resourcing the changes needed, either at the expense of activities elsewhere within the institution or it being beyond the resource capacity of

the institution from the outset. As a result, government agencies need to provide institutions with access to annual continued financial support to progress investments in estates and operations in order to achieve greenhouse gas emission reductions and adaptation for future climate change. Funding should be made available for both the scoping and development of investment plans and capital investments to deliver these plans. The Department for Education should commission research to understand the scale of the sector's costs for achieving net zero targets, in line with recent work by [Teach the Future on schools reaching net zero](#).

Demand 8 - Partnerships and Funding - Research

External funding bodies should require grant-holding institutions to have a net zero target and strategy in place as a prerequisite to receiving funding. In addition, researchers should be required to minimise business travel where possible, and any business travel incurred during the funded-research offset in line with the [COP26 Universities Network's Offsetting Principles](#). Work towards this action has already been taken by the [Wellcome Trust](#).

Demand 9 - Partnerships and Funding - Learning, Teaching and Research

The relevant Education Departments within national governments should support the creation of a virtual Greens Skills Hub. The Hub would connect researchers and businesses with college and university teaching staff to ensure up to date technological advances and best practices across all areas of the economy are shared widely and teaching content can be readily adapted to these developments. This would ensure students and graduates are equipped with relevant and applicable sustainability knowledge and skills relating to their chosen field of study.

Want to have your student voice heard and represented at COY16 and COP26?

[**Add your signature to this statement here.**](#)

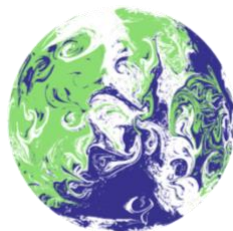
COY16 is the official route for youth engagement and representation at COP26, facilitated by YOUNGO. If you are a student and support this statement and demands, please sign using the link above and submit your name, institution and your student email address to confirm you are a student.

This statement alongside the student signatories will be sent to the UK COY16 Youth Delegates in October ahead of COY16 on the 28th – 31st October 2021.

On behalf of the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education Student Commissioners:

Thank you for your support.

- Amy Brazier, Katie Major, Marta Crispo and Manveer Gill
Student Climate Commissioners



**UN CLIMATE
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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY