

University and college leaders launch 12-month bid to find ways to combat climate emergency

University and college leaders are being urged to redouble their efforts to tackle climate change by committing to the newly-formed Climate Commission which aims to create a clear, cohesive and consistent response to the government's declared Climate and Environment Emergency.

Association of Colleges (AoC), EAUC, GuildHE and Universities UK (UUK) are calling on vice-chancellors and principals of tertiary education providers to prepare their institution for, and to act against, the climate crisis. They are being urged to use their unique position to harness the latest academic thinking, commit to action and drive change.

The Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education Leaders will be officially launched on 13 November 2019 at Ravensbourne University London. Over the next 12 months, the Commission will develop a strategic framework and set ambitious targets, including proposals for ensuring progress.

Working with students, UK government, regulatory bodies and sector agencies, including UK Research & Innovation, Advance HE and student groups, the Commission's Council will collaborate with institutions to ensure they reach the UK government's target of reducing all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. It will also seek expert evidence from academics and researchers to consider how to use existing good practice and encourage greater collaboration.

UK institutions continue to show their commitment to tackling this important issue with many initiatives already in place across the country. The Climate Research Unit, founded at the University of East Anglia, ensures scientists can track changes in the climate back as far as AD 800 and helps with weather predictions and global warming research. Bridgend College has an ambitious strategy which includes sustainability being embedded in all roles by 2022. Additionally, international research led by the University of Leeds is measuring the speed at which Antarctic ice is melting and Manchester Metropolitan University's carbon-literacy scheme, which trains students in tackling climate change, has been recognised by the United Nations as one of 100 worldwide Transformative Action Programs.

A final report will be presented at COP26, the UN's climate change summit, in Glasgow in November 2020.

Professor James Longhurst, Assistant Vice-Chancellor, University of the West of England and EAUC Commissioner, said: "The sector currently lacks a clear and agreed road-map to emissions neutrality. The Climate Commission has been created to build this road - it is sector-led and action-focussed to achieve the step-change in sector performance we all want to see. We are incredibly pleased to be working in partnership with AoC, UUK and GuildHE – this partnership enables universities and colleges to work together in an unprecedented way to tackle the climate crisis."

Professor Judith Petts, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Plymouth and UUK Commissioner, said: "Universities have the power and the responsibility to make a significant global contribution to the urgent need for emissions reduction and climate change adaptation. Universities drive scientific understanding of the scale and speed of the crisis, they are leading climate emergency responses and are embedding sustainability education across their programmes to equip graduates to make a difference. I hope the Climate Commission will be a driving force for leadership, action and impact through the higher and further education sectors and networks."

Professor Joy Carter, Vice-Chancellor, University of Winchester and GuildHE Commissioner, said: "The threats posed by the climate emergency are pressing and it is important that universities and colleges play a leading role in responding to these. Through our role educating the next generation, as large businesses and employers as well as helping

to research solutions there is so much that we can do. Many universities and colleges are already delivering innovative and inspirational actions to tackle climate change and the Climate Commission will provide a national and strategic focus and consider how we make a step-change in the sector's activities."

Steve Frampton, AoC President and Commissioner, said: "It is vital that colleges play an integral role in tackling the climate emergency. Alongside our partners we have a uniquely powerful opportunity to raise the profile of these issues as an educator and crucially as an employer as well. Students are often the best at taking proactive steps to tackle the issues that will affect the next generation – colleges have a duty to empower them to create a sustainable future. Colleges, as employers can also make decisions about where and who they invest in, with huge purchasing power. There is much work to be done, and the commission will provide innovative, joined up solutions to one of the most urgent crises we face."

Lord Deben, Chair of the Committee on Climate Change, said: "Universities and colleges have a centrally important role to play in tackling climate change. Reaching net zero emissions is essential, it is feasible, and as a sector dedicated to knowledge and thought leadership it is rightfully expected. The Commission has the ability to bring the full force of the UK's expansive and powerful tertiary education sector to bear on climate change, with students and staff working together to lead the charge. I look forward to seeing the results presented at COP 26 in Glasgow."

Lizzie Houghton, Students' Union Activities and Development Officer, University of Manchester, said: "Climate breakdown is happening right now, and is already having a devastating impact on people across the world, and will continue to threaten the future of the planet and the people on it. Young people will not have the same opportunities as those that went before them - and if we continue to do nothing, we face extinction. We must take urgent action, and universities and colleges have a huge part to play in this fight for global climate justice. The Climate Commission shows that leaders are actually starting to listen and taking action – I encourage students to reach out to their Vice-Chancellors, Principals and Presidents, to get your voices heard, and to work with them to make the changes desperately needed."



Notes

1. The Commission is made up of Steve Frampton, AoC President, AoC representative; Professor James Longhurst, Assistant Vice-Chancellor, University of the West of England and EAUC representative; Professor Joy Carter CBE DL, Vice-Chancellor, University of Winchester and GuildHE representative and Professor Judith Petts CBE, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Plymouth and UUK representative.
2. Lord Deben, Chair of the Committee on Climate Change and Lizzie Houghton Students' Union Activities & Development Officer, University of Manchester will be giving keynote speeches at the launch.
3. **About the AoC:** Association of Colleges is the national voice for further education, sixth form, tertiary and specialist colleges in England. We are a not-for-profit membership organisation established in 1996 by colleges, for colleges. Our members make up almost 95% of the sector - transforming 2.2 million lives each year. Visit <https://www.aoc.co.uk/>

4. **About the EAUC:** EAUC is the alliance for sustainability leadership in education. EAUC represents over 200 institutions with a combined total of 2 million students and nearly 400,000 staff with a spending budget of over £25 billion. We help leaders, academics and professionals to drive sustainability to the heart of their post-16 education institutions. For more information, visit www.eauc.org.uk.
5. **About GuildHE:** GuildHE is an official voice for UK higher education, especially for universities and colleges with a tradition of learning, research and innovation in industries and professions. GuildHE's 50 members are universities, university colleges, further education colleges delivering higher education and specialist institutions from the traditional and private sectors. Visit <https://guildhe.ac.uk/>
6. **About UUK:** Universities UK is the collective voice of 136 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its mission is to create the conditions for UK universities to be the best in the world; maximising their positive impact locally, nationally and globally. Universities UK acts on behalf of universities, represented by their heads of institution. Visit: www.universitiesuk.ac.uk