

YOUTH VOICES FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES IN HIGHER EDUCATION - a youth-led policy brief

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Why should universities engage students in climate change and sustainability policy-making?

- The climate crises demands an effort and change across all sectors of society.
- Universities are uniquely situated to develop an effective response to the climate crises through **education** and **research** (Latter & Capstick 2021; Gardner et al., 2021).
- Young people have raised concerns on the current education system's ability to prepare them for the uncertainty of the future. Yet, their voice and impact is almost non-existent in climate change and sustainability policy-making (Dunlop & Rushton 2022).
- Young people can make meaningful recommendations for sustainable futures in higher education.

What did we do?

We held a picnic participatory workshop at a park outside of UCL. We asked questions to students about their experiences of learning about climate change and sustainability in their degrees. Afterwards, we collaboratively wrote a policy brief based on our recommendations for decision-makers in universities which is published on the UCL Centre for Climate Change website (Zaidi et al., 2023).



YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

A central theme across all recommendations is that combatting climate change and the sustainability agenda must set an overarching context for all higher education policy priorities and decision making. All universities across the UK should outline their role of mitigating climate change and promoting equitable long-term sustainable futures for all.

We categorised youth recommendations into three categories:

Curriculum

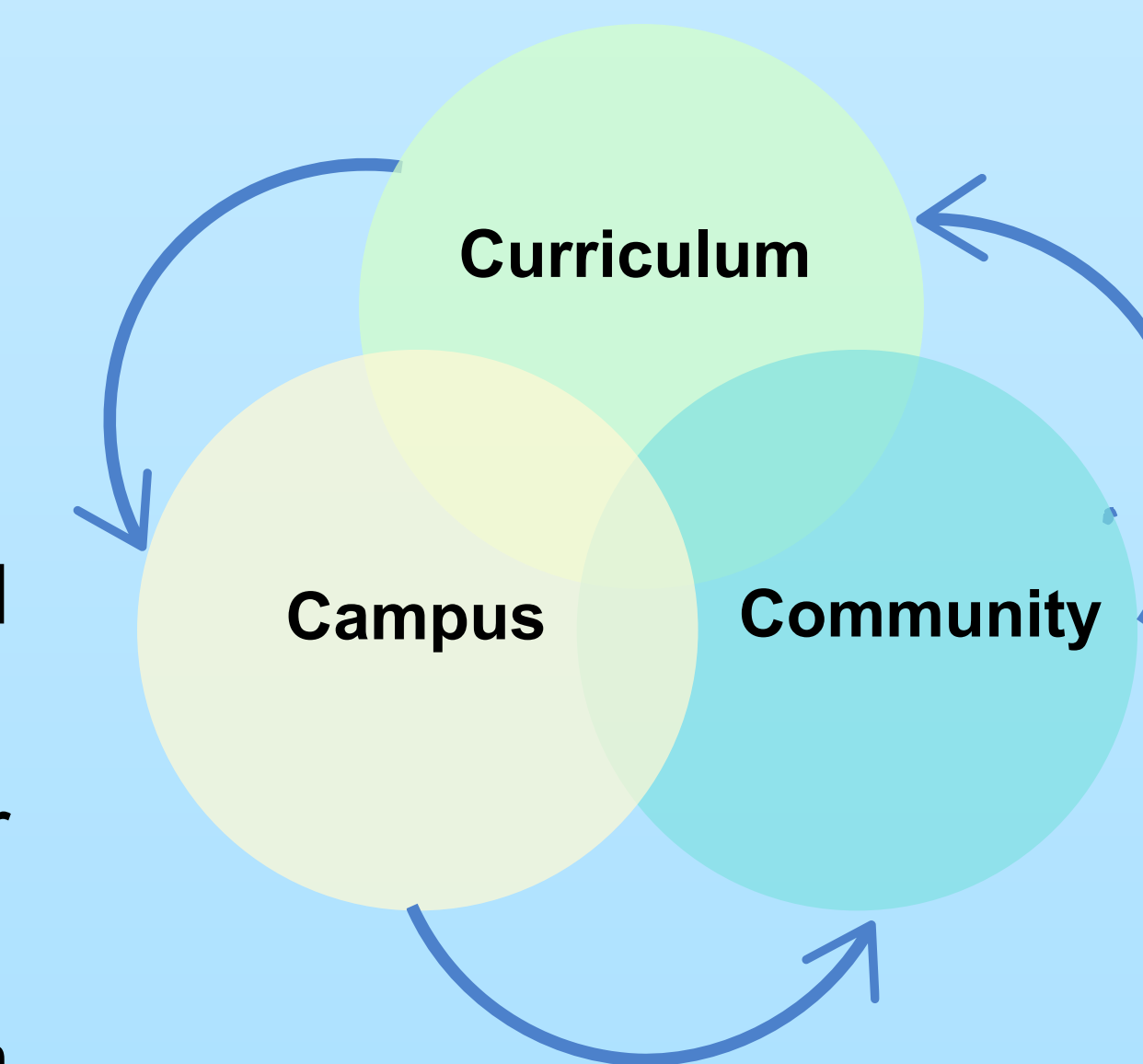
- Introduce **compulsory learning outcomes**, where applicable in degree curricula, which are framed by hopefulness, focus on solutions, foster critical thinking in students and draw case studies from diverse contexts.
- Introduce **compulsory sustainability training** for all students.
- Provide **interdisciplinary learning** opportunities.
- More **opportunities** for students to engage with and learn from experts.

Campus

- Prioritise **transparent, evidence-informed** actions and **long-term impact** for campus-wide sustainability initiatives.
- Elect leaders of the university that have a **clear goal** to achieve sustainability and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- Opportunities for students to be directly and regularly **involved with decision making**.
- Take actions to **cease any affiliations** with mass polluting companies and **hold them accountable**.

Community

- **Improve communication** between the university and students.
- Encourage more **extra-curricular** opportunities for students on climate change and sustainability.
- Provide **free** learning opportunities such as in-person lectures, online courses and resources to members of the general public.
- Provide opportunities for students in **collaboration** with industries and businesses to work on **multidisciplinary** climate change and sustainability solutions.
- Provide monetary incentive for students to conduct **research** projects to implement or evaluate climate change and sustainability **solutions**.



References

Dunlop, L. & Rushton, E. A. C. (2022). Putting climate change at the heart of education: Is England's strategy a placebo for policy? *British Educational Research Journal*, 48(6), pp. 1083-1101. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3816>

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Implications and Next Steps

This policy brief will be used to inform:

- The ongoing development of a new BA programme 'Youth, Society and Sustainable Futures' at the IOE, UCL.
- Dialogue and collaboration within UCL and we plan to send the policy brief to the Provost and Vice-Provost of Education.
- Future youth-led research on sustainability in higher education.