

# COP26 CAMPAIGN

## Decarbonise and Decolonise 2030

### CONTEXT

Global leaders are set to unite and agree on actions to tackle the climate emergency at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26)<sup>1</sup> in Glasgow, in November 2021.

UCU, in alignment with calls for action from SOS-UK<sup>2</sup> (through Teach the Future<sup>3</sup> campaign and MockCOP26<sup>4</sup>) and NUS<sup>5</sup>, have a joined-up campaign for colleges and universities to decarbonise and decolonise by 2030.

Building upon existing model claims that sit within UCU's Green New Deal<sup>6</sup> for universities and colleges, this claim and associated campaign seeks to assist branches in progressing two key areas within their institutions, for a joined up approach to climate justice.

### BACKGROUND

UCU recognises that climate change is a social justice issue. The consequences of the climate crisis are not distributed equally, and we can't begin to understand the origins of the climate emergency without first understanding the history of colonialism, imperialism and Western high-carbon economic systems that have driven us here. Through the process of colonialism (i.e. physically taking control of other countries) and imperialism (i.e. imposing Western political and high-carbon economic systems on non-Western countries), our systems have been replicated globally, to the benefit of a small minority of people, many of whom are in the Global North ('the West'). The climate crisis is caused overwhelmingly by higher income nations, communities and individuals, yet it is the poorer nations and communities that will feel the effects of climate injustice most acutely. Colonialism and imperialism, and their legacies, have stunted the economic capacity and social capital of many in the Global South, and often Black and Brown communities in the Global North, limiting their ability to respond to the climate crisis. Consequences of the climate crisis are making immigration regimes in countries like ours even more oppressive. It is a gender issue too; the UN has calculated that 80% of people displaced by the climate crisis are women.

Colonial history and white imperialism are not just things of the past. Climate activism has often been monopolised in the media and academic writing by white, western thinkers, movements and





activists, despite significant history of environmental, climate and social justice activism led by Black communities, Indigenous peoples and people of colour. Action and discourse to tackle climate change are therefore the unlikely victims of modern-day colonialism and white washing.

*“The British education system itself, is firmly rooted in colonial epistemology, which centres and upholds the British empire and the forms that it takes today.”* Sofia Akel, 2020<sup>7</sup>

To deliver climate justice, and therefore social justice, as we emerge from the Coronavirus crisis, we need a strategy, founded on planning and concerted action, which meaningfully tackle the root causes of social injustice and the climate crisis, which include the legacies of colonialism. Decolonising and decarbonising our education institutions provides a symbiotic process for systematically addressing the climate emergency whilst delivering on climate justice.

UCU welcomes Welsh Governments' policy commitment for a carbon neutral public sector by 2030 and is calling on all institutions to align with this target on tackling carbon emissions. UCU, together with SOS-UK, NUS and Teach the Future, believe a 2030 target date for decarbonising institutions is both achievable and necessary. We further believe that our joint commitment to tackling climate justice through ethical decarbonisation, must go hand in hand with demands to decolonise institutions. In England the issue of decolonising institutions has in recent months been used in an ideological culture war by those in government, aided by the media. An Anti-Racist Wales – Race Equality Action Plan for Wales 2021 ([https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-03/race-equality-action-plan-an-anti-racist-wales\\_2.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-03/race-equality-action-plan-an-anti-racist-wales_2.pdf)), out for consultation until 15th July 2021, clearly includes the role of education providers (schools, FE and HE) to take an anti-racist approach to decolonising. References to education in this document would be useful to TU members from all nations. It is time that, as student activists, trade union members and educational professionals, we address these misconceptions and wilful misrepresentations.

*“We need to reform the entire education system, embedding sustainability as a core principle of every single discipline, linking this to learning about our colonial past and its hand in creating the climate crisis. The climate crisis is a racist crisis; climate impacts are disproportionately felt by black and brown communities due to structures retained from colonialism.”* Teach the Future, 2020<sup>8</sup>

Our campaign for 'Decarbonise and Decolonise 2030' reflects existing union policy and would also meet the UN's Education for Sustainable Development goals<sup>9</sup> which set a target of 2030 for implementation.

## DECARBONISE

*“Decarbonising our education system means transforming how and what we learn so that education sufficiently addresses and prepares students for the climate crisis and ecological emergency. That means our curricula must equip students with the knowledge, skills, attributes, and values to*





*tackle the reformation of our currently carbon intense economic system. Furthermore, it means thinking critically and challenging the influence of corporations like fossil fuel companies in our research, funding, and sponsorship.” SOS-UK, 2020<sup>10</sup>*

Decarbonising is woven into all areas of the Green New Deal Bargaining and Negotiation framework.<sup>11</sup> The GND calls for changes across all areas of our education institutions, inclusive of strategic, operational and teaching, learning and research. More details can be found in the respective areas of the GND demands.

The claim seeks to address (but is not limited to) the following key areas for decarbonising:

- declaring a climate emergency and committing to time-bound and target focussed actions
- reforming curricula<sup>12</sup> to embed transformational learning for climate justice across all disciplines at all levels
- ensuring decarbonising carbon and energy management plans addresses climate justice for all
- ethical investment and banking policies and commitments, considerate of where investments are held and who they benefit
- low carbon ethical food policies and commitments, and biodiversity, environmentally and socially positive approaches to land-use/management.

### Carbon reduction

Operationally, this calls for institutions to publicly commit to net zero emissions for scopes<sup>13</sup> 1, 2 and 3 by 2030.

Within 12 months of this commitment, institutions should have developed a fully-costed, comprehensive action plan showing the planned emission reduction curve.

Targets should be set by the end of the 2021/22 academic year and action plans published by the end of the 2021/22 academic year.

#### Scope 1<sup>14</sup>

Direct emissions from the activity of an institution through owned or directly controlled sources. For example on site fuel combustion or fuel used in university/college-owned vehicles.

#### Scope 2

Indirect emissions generated from electricity purchased or used by an institution.

#### Scope 3

All other indirect emissions, produced as a consequence of an institution's activities. This includes emissions from business travel, procurement, waste and water supply, endowment investments and agricultural landholdings.





### Offsetting

Institutions should plan to restrict the use of offsetting to scope 3 emissions that are not currently viable to eliminate. Offsets should be procured through credible schemes, such as Gold standard-accredited schemes or locally-developed alternatives, and institutions should commit to a reasonable minimum offset price. This aims to ensure institutions are both considering the ethical and environmental implications of their offsetting.

Offsetting should not be used as a way for institutions to shift the burden of their emissions elsewhere whilst continuing business as usual in the UK. The social impact, as well as the credibility of carbon savings, of offsetting schemes must be comprehensively considered.

For more information on these specific demands, see our UCU Green New Deal quick guides:<sup>15</sup>

***Bargaining Objective 1: Climate Emergency and Associated Policies; Bargaining Objective 4: Energy and Carbon Management; and Bargaining Objective 5: Ethical Investment and Banking.***

### Biodiversity

Universities and colleges should develop robust plans to increase biodiversity net gain on campus and beyond. All institutions should conduct baseline and ongoing ecological surveys to monitor biodiversity net gain. Where institutions work with partner organisations' biodiversity enhancement initiatives, they must ensure local communities and individuals are actively involved with decision making processes to avoid neo-colonial approaches to environmentalism.

Also see ***UCU Green New Deal quick guide: Bargaining Objective 6: Food and land use.***

## DECOLONISE

*"Decolonising education is often understood as the process in which we rethink, reframe and reconstruct the curricula and research that preserve the Europe-centred, colonial lens. It should not be mistaken for 'diversification,' as diversity can still exist within this western bias. Decolonisation goes further and deeper in challenging the institutional hierarchy and monopoly on knowledge, moving out of a western framework"* Sofia Akel, 2020<sup>16</sup>

As with decarbonising, a whole institution approach is necessary to genuinely address a just transition, inclusive of decolonising. This includes strategic, operational and curricula reform.

### Education for sustainable development and decolonising institutions

It is important to note that sustainable development is not purely about environmental issues, as is commonly misconstrued. It includes a balance of economic, social and environmental factors which are interconnected, overlapping and interdependent to ensure environmental and climate justice deliver on social justice.

Education for sustainable development (ESD), is inclusive of both content and the pedagogies - how teaching and learning is facilitated and assessed. By realising that ESD is about transforming how we do education, it should enable an understanding of the connectivity between ESD and







decolonising. Both ESD and decolonising education encourage us to look critically at our current situation and envision a better world, inclusive of social justice and environmental prosperity. We cannot do this without including different knowledge systems, values and perspectives.

We have adopted the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) definition of ESD:

*“ESD empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment”*

We believe that decolonising institutions is a key component to achieving a just and sustainable education system, which should therefore translate through to how society is shaped and interacts. Decolonising education seeks to critically challenge institutional hierarchies of knowledge, to move beyond a Westernised framework through the process of reforming and reframing curricula and research and operational structures. To truly decolonise our education institutions, it is necessary to look at every aspect of what they do, how they operate and the structures they uphold.

The claim seeks to address (but is not limited to) the following key areas for decolonising:

### 1. History

Acknowledge and address imperial past through a process of open and transparent dialogue between TU representatives, students and staff (inclusive of senior leadership, academics and operational staff).

### 2. Curriculum and learning (formal, informal and subliminal)

Incorporating ESD into all aspects of learning to achieve key ESD competencies such as critical thinking, systems thinking, self-awareness and integrated problem solving competency. It is recommended that the QAA and Advance HE ESD Guidance (2021)<sup>17</sup> is utilised to support academics to embed such principals into their practices, although HE focussed it would provide a useful resource for further education staff too.

- Consider global citizenship in the context of students’ and academics’ own discipline and in their professional and personal lives.
- Democratic and participatory learning approaches are modelled. Teaching, learning and assessment activities are linked to real-life concerns.
- Think about issues of social justice, ethics and wellbeing, and how these relate to ecological and economic factors.
- Develop a future-facing outlook, learning to think about the consequences of actions, and how systems and societies can be adapted to ensure sustainable futures.





### Climate justice-themed learning weeks

Climate justice-themed learning weeks aim to incorporate climate justice into not only the curriculum but wider aspects of the institutions' functions such as catering and operational services (eg IT, estates, HR, marketing and communications etc). This approach will allow employers to pilot what they feel may be a radical approach to transforming the curriculum during a themed week or more. Such learning weeks aim to encourage all involved to develop ESD competencies in relation to climate justice to promote a holistic intersectional approach to activities, initiatives and events.

The website is now an on-going resource of climate curriculum and ideas:

<https://ctlw.web.ucl.ac.uk>

### Skills and training

Of particular relevance to FE, but important for HE too, is the need to ensure vocational and professional gateway courses and training are adequately equipping students and learners with the skills and competencies for a just transition to a net zero carbon economy. This applies to apprenticeships, wider FE training and courses, as well as HE curricula.

UK, Welsh and Scottish governments have all recognised education, training and skills as a priority area, as highlighted in:

- The ten point plan for a green industrial revolution (UK govt. 2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution/title>
- Low Carbon Delivery Plan (Welsh govt. 2019)
- Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero (Scottish govt., 2020) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/pages/5/>

See also, An Emergency Plan for Green Jobs (Friends of the Earth, 2021 - [https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2021-03/EMERGENCY\\_PLAN\\_GREEN\\_JOBS\\_FEB\\_2021.pdf](https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2021-03/EMERGENCY_PLAN_GREEN_JOBS_FEB_2021.pdf)) A useful report for understanding the role of progressing education and skills training to address both decarbonising and decolonising.

### 3. Representation, governance and awarding processes

Representation needs to be addressed in governance structures and power relations across the institution, staff (through engagement with HR and SLT, to address recruitment policies, processes and practices), students (establishing fair mechanisms for representation through the students' union and institution, and ensuring positive student experience), and student/staff progress. Likewise, addressing awarding gaps (attainment gap) needs to be done through a systematic review of staff and student progression rates to identify and assess structural barriers and/or opportunities being upheld by the institution.

To progress decarbonising and decolonising education synergistically, and to ensure this institutional change is anti-oppressive, it is advocated that TU members and employees work in collaboration and solidarity with TU representatives from Equality standing committees.





#### 4. Funding and operations

Ethical investment policy and divestment from fossil fuels, arms and unethical investments are inextricably linked. Given the historic imprint of colonialism and imperialism in both the finance and fossil fuel and arms sectors, it is essential for institutions to consider the ethical implications of redirecting energy and finance to zero carbon ethical sources.

If the institution does not have in-house expertise to ensure a decarbonise and decolonise lens is adopted to financial and operations decision making for zero carbon, it is advised that external consultation is sought, or a specific role is created to ensure a joined-up approach.

### DECARBONISE AND DECOLONISE DEMANDS FOR BRANCHES

To tackle the climate emergency and ecological crisis, we believe UK universities and colleges should take a whole institution approach to addressing decarbonising and decolonising; strategically, operationally and through teaching, learning and research. This ensures efforts to address environmental and climate action also deliver on issues of justice.

*“Climate justice is at the core of the Green New Deal and provides a framework for institutions to decarbonise in ways that tackle inequality and enhance the lives of ordinary people, workers, and communities. We know the climate crisis and racial inequality are bound up in the same systems and so if we do not tackle both we will be unable to tackle either.”*

Zamzam Ibrahim, NUS President and SOS-UK President 2019 – 2020

Larissa Kennedy, NUS President and SOS-UK President 2020-21

The demands, negotiators’ objectives and negotiators’ resources below are not exhaustive, they draw on a bringing together of key demands and objectives highlighted in the separate bargaining objectives of the UCU Green New Deal. For a holistic and just transition to a low carbon/zero carbon education sector, it is recommended the demands and objectives are not considered in isolation from the other bargaining objectives.

### DEMANDS

- Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development across all of the curriculum by 2030.
- Implementation of ESD across all aspects of institutional practice including research, funding, library, IT services, students union.
- Establishment of a time-limited institutional decolonising commission with trade union, student union and local community involvement; to address and redress any links to imperial past and conduct a systematic review of representation across the institution to include staff, students and governance structures.
- Quality CPD and training for staff to prepare them for climate proofing and decolonising their courses.





- Ask the employer to adopt (or if one is in place) review/update a Carbon management and Energy Management Plan, which is inclusive of ethics and climate justice. Key areas this may need to be addressed within include scope 3 emissions and supply chain/procurement management systems.
- Agree a mechanism for tracking carbon reduction performance and an annual review of progress.
- Agree a mechanism for determining, measuring and evaluating the institutions handprint<sup>18</sup> (positive sustainability impacts, inclusive of social and economic factors).
- Develop or enhance a set of related policies including Transport and Travel Policy that addresses carbon and justice for all.
- Conduct a review on carbon footprint and handprint of supply chains.
- Develop a mechanism for the consideration of carbon and ethics to be made within all procurement decisions.

### Staff resource and capacity for initiating changes

There is a workload issue associated with this. Employers cannot expect staff to make major changes to their lesson plans and schemes of work without the necessary resources. If employers are serious about wanting buy-in from staff on ESD they must provide appropriate support and this should, therefore, also form part of the claim. UCU is offering a CPD programme for greening the curriculum. Updates on courses can be accessed here:

<https://cpd.web.ucu.org.uk/about-ucus-cpd-programme/>

## NEGOTIATORS' RESOURCES

- UCU's Climate Themed Learning week teaching resources: <https://ctlw.web.ucu.org.uk/>
- Greener Jobs Alliance climate action modules: <http://www.greenerjobsalliance.co.uk/courses/>
- NUS Decolonise Education hub: <https://www.nus.org.uk/decoloniseeducation>
- SOS-UK Responsible Futures supported change framework and accreditation programme: <https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/responsible-futures/about>
- SOS-UK For Good supports dissertations, placements and projects that progress environment
- SOS-UK Global Goals Teach In is a campaign to put the SDGs at the heart of education: <https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/sdgteachin>
- QAA and Advance HE Education for Sustainable Development Guidance: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development#>
- SOS-UK research reports on education and climate: <https://sustainability.unioncloud.org/our-research/our-research>







- Teach the future is a youth-led campaign to urgently repurpose the entire education system around the climate emergency and ecological crisis to deliver climate justice:  
<https://www.teachthefuture.uk/>
- ILO Skills for a greener future: A global view. December 2019:  
[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_732214.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_732214.pdf)
- Greener workplaces for a just transition: A Wales TUC toolkit for trade unionists. TUC Wales:  
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/greener-workplaces-just-transition-wales-tuc-toolkit-trade-unionists>  
(Good UK comparator and excellent source of Welsh info)
- Pebble Mag article by Teach the Future campaigner and activist, 'Why now is the time to decolonise and decarbonise our education system':  
<https://pebblemag.com/magazine/doing/why-now-is-the-time-to-decolonise-and-decarbonise-our-education-system>
- Each Other article 'What decolonising the curriculum really means':  
<https://eachother.org.uk/decolonising-the-curriculum-what-it-really-means/>

**To access the full GND bargaining and negotiation framework**, click here:

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11326/Green-new-deal-bargaining-guide--modelclaim/pdf/green-new-deal\\_bargaining-guide\\_jan21.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11326/Green-new-deal-bargaining-guide--modelclaim/pdf/green-new-deal_bargaining-guide_jan21.pdf)

**To access the UCU Green New Deal quick guides**, which are broken down by demand areas see the downloadable PDFs here: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/green-new-deal>

**To discuss further, seek advice on progressing this demand or other aspects of the GND**, and to use the model claim and letter, please contact [environment@ucu.org.uk](mailto:environment@ucu.org.uk).





## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://ukcop26.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sos-uk.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.teachthefuture.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mockcop.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nus.org.uk/decoloniseeducation>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ucu.org.uk/green-new-deal>

<sup>7</sup> <https://eachother.org.uk/decolonising-the-curriculum-what-it-really-means/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.teachthefuture.uk/blog/commandeering-the-curriculum-for-the-climate-a-response-to-amanda-spielman-ofsted-chief-inspector>

<sup>9</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>

<sup>10</sup> <https://sdg4education2030.org/the-goal>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/5364/Login?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ucu.org.uk%2F2969>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11409/GND-quick-guide-3-curriculum/pdf/GND\\_Quick\\_Guide3\\_curriculum\\_Mar21.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11409/GND-quick-guide-3-curriculum/pdf/GND_Quick_Guide3_curriculum_Mar21.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.carbontargets.uk/glossary>

See explanation of scopes 1, 2 and 3 on Carbon Targets webpage.

<sup>14</sup> Scope definitions sourced from Carbon Targets - <https://www.carbontargets.uk/glossary>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ucu.org.uk/green-new-deal>

<sup>6</sup> <https://eachother.org.uk/decolonising-the-curriculum-what-it-really-means/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development#:~:text=ESD%20Guidance%202021&text=QAA%20and%20Advance%20HE%20brought,society%20towards%20a%20sustainable%20future>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.scp-centre.org/our-work/handprint/>

