



UCU Sustainability Survey

3rd December, 2025

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About SOS UK

We're a UK charity transforming education so people protect the climate and nature.

We unite people from every background, inside and outside education, because protecting our earth matters to each and every one of us.

For over six years, UCU and SOS UK have worked closely to strengthen student and worker voice for climate and sustainability.

List of acronyms

CEEC – UCU’s Climate and Ecological Emergency Committee

CPD – continued professional development

FE – further education

HE – higher education

GND – Green New Deal

SOS UK – Students Organising for Sustainability

TU – trade union

SU – students’ union

UCU – University College Union

Survey background - aims

Across Spring and Summer 2025, a survey was circulated amongst UCU Green Reps and wider membership to gain a greater understanding of how:

- UCU members viewed their engagement with the union
- How issues of climate change intersected with their role as a Green Rep, UCU member or with their employment
- The support they'd like to help bring climate action to the forefront in their institutions.

Survey background - context

Survey was designed and delivered in the context of:

- Long lasting SOS UK and UCU partnership supporting members with sustainability
- Decolonise Decarbonise 2030 Campaign
- Green New Deal bargaining claim and training
- HE and FE national pay claims linked to climate and sustainability
- A wide range of UCU CPD sustainability workshops
- Significant challenges in the tertiary education sector - however, clear links to wider sustainability challenges

Survey background - **respondents**

- Total of **64** respondents, majority on academic contracts and **77%** on open ended contracts, **9 focus group participants**
- **49** respondents from HE, **15** from FE
- Majority of responses hold positions within UCU branch, and **72.5%** are in their first UCU role, including:
 - Green Rep (40) - **47.5% with facilities time**
 - Caseworker (10)
 - Committee Member (9)
 - Department Rep (7)
 - Chair / President (5)
 - Learning / Education (44)

Engagement with UCU climate work - **why?**

Respondents were asked how they became interested in climate and sustainability; responses include:

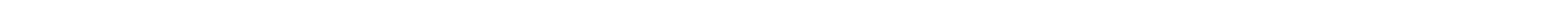
- Previous experience with climate campaigning
 - Extinction Rebellion, Responsible Futures etc.
- Climate issues aligning with research, discipline and/or pedagogy
- Existing concern for climate crisis
- Lack of interest amongst other branch members, stepping in due to necessity
- Direct experience with the impacts of climate change



Engagement with UCU climate work – how?

Respondents were asked about their existing knowledge of UCU climate and sustainability support:

- Only **27%** of respondents are familiar or very familiar with UCU GND bargaining framework
- **42.9%** of respondents are aware of CEEC
- Only **22.2%** of respondents are aware of climate related HE and FE national pay claims



Engagement with UCU climate work – **impact**

32.5% of respondents feel engagement with UCU climate work has impacted their employment in several ways, including:

- More awareness and confidence to ask employer difficult questions
- Ability to embed climate and sustainability into research and pedagogy
- More collaboration across departments/institutions
- Leading on the institution's sustainability initiatives for example through steering groups and programmes like Responsible Futures



Engagement with UCU climate work – **impact**

Respondents have engaged in UCU climate and sustainability support in the following ways:

- **27.4%** are aware of formal meetings with employers on climate related matters
- Only **3.2%** of respondents have used the GND framework
- **62.8%** of respondents have met with SU on climate issues
- **44.2%** say their branch has been involved in local climate protests



Engagement with UCU climate work - impact

Respondents have experienced the following opportunities and challenges to engaging with UCU climate and sustainability support and progressing TU climate aims:

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involvement in existing SU or institution led programmes like Responsible Futures and Fossil Free Careers• Developing staff/student liaison groups for increased capacity• Involvement in existing SU campaigns led by sabbatical officers• Inputting into sustainability strategy and policy developed by the institution – including sustainable travel policies• Bargaining for facilities time for green reps	<p>Capacity (67.2%)</p> <p>Other pressing issues and claims</p> <p>Lack of knowledge and resources</p> <p>Lack of momentum within branches,</p> <p>Lack of concrete and manageable campaign asks</p>

Support for climate and sustainability in branches

Survey findings	Suggested next steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Most respondents feel UCU CPD and wider training/resources can be a useful avenue for increased engagement with the GND framework and general climate work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review UCU CPD content with CEEC & membersCall out/survey on topics that are not currently addressedClearer guidance on running CPD sessions within branches - and opening branch sessions to non - members
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Respondents cite lack of capacity and disempowerment as challenges to doing more climate work within branches due to other challenges and priorities64.9% of respondents feel there is an opportunity to do more on climate by linking it to the Health and Safety agenda, and 61.4% think it can be linked to other existing claims	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Specific CPD training/resources on aligning existing TU challenges with sustainabilityReview GND designDevelop training for Union Learning Reps and Health & Safety Reps on sustainabilityLinking GND and climate to wider national claimsDevelop sessions on university climate policy – how to understand it and how to hold institution accountable
<ul style="list-style-type: none">75.4% of respondents feel increased engagement with students provides an opportunity to do more on climate and sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review existing CPD on working with student unionsIdentify how to deliver CPD on working with student unions to more branches, inviting along their SUsStrategic approach to introducing branches to SUs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">75% of respondents want to develop a workplace green network/action group and 56% believe this would help progress work related to GND	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Consult with members on what these groups look likeBranch specific training on how this can be doneSupport on how to get TU representation on sustainability committees



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