

WHAT IS UoM MISSING?

A CLIMATE CURRICULUM

The climate crisis - and especially climate justice - needs to be integrated within the core curriculum across courses.

The University curriculum has not kept up with changing times. This is because a curriculum takes time to develop and changing it takes time and energy. It has enormous inertia, for a variety of other reasons too. Therefore climate change is often dealt with in a haphazard and inconsistent manner across the Faculties and schools.



Given that climate change is going to dominate the lives of today's students over the coming decades, we think the climate crisis should not just be a topic that is explored only in modules such as atmospheric sciences or environmental politics. We must all understand that the climate crisis compels all of us to act. No matter what path we choose to pursue - physics, policy making, music, business and so on - we need to act collectively to address the crisis.

The University must change its curriculum in the upcoming months (yes, it is that urgent) and years. It should not just "teach climate facts" to students, but it must spark conversations among students. This shouldn't just be limited to the 'Sustainability Challenge' which is offered in the first week of university (and, as alluded to above, isn't always viewed as a highly engaging activity by students who have taken part). There must be an ongoing process - students need to develop the skills and tools to brainstorm creative solutions and work with people from different academic backgrounds. Students from all courses should leave university able to analyse and discuss the impacts of the climate crisis on our ecosystems.

Climate science and data are needed, but on their own are not enough. Students need the tools to tackle the ethical questions raised by the climate crisis. For instance, the conversation of 'climate migrants' or 'climate refugees' should not just focus on the number of vulnerable people who will be displaced from their homes. It must also cover the ethical implications of our choices - is it morally defensible for us to refuse entry to refugees on the grounds that "we lack the resources" to support them, or that they are "not our country's problem"? These are difficult conversations. Not everyone will agree, but that's the whole point - we need everyone to participate in these conversations. We need to work together, despite our differences

Most importantly, there also needs to be a "safer space" for students to voice their fears and anxieties about the climate crisis. We can come up with the most brilliant ideas, but they will rarely become reality without individual and collective morale maintenance. Emotional intelligence, adaptability and tenacity are some of the most essential skills we need. If there's one thing that the last few years of climate inaction by governments has taught us, it is that persistence is key. But in spite of this, universities rarely take these elements into account while designing courses and teaching methods. It's all very "information deficit filled, tick the box, move on..."

WHAT'S UoM MISSING? (CONTINUED)

In creating this Handbook, we spoke with students across different faculties and departments, and the Education Officer at the Students' Union. We asked them what they thought was missing in their courses, and what was needed. Their answers are below:

"I study BSc Psychology and Sustainability is a rarely mentioned topic. We covered one lecture in first year about encouraging green behaviours as an example exercise for a team work project. I'm passionate about applying theories of lifestyle behaviour change to sustainability and there is definitely a gap for this in existing modules on the course as well as scope for a complete module on sustainability on its own. At the very least, the climate crisis should be covered as a part of the welcome week the same way social justice issues are covered. I want to see climate change and sustainability embedded as examples with an impact on mental health just as frequently as other lifestyle experiences like smoking or exercising"

HOLLY, THIRD YEAR BSC PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT

"I'm a final year Mechanical Engineering student, and it was disappointing that there are no modules relating to the ongoing climate crisis in the first two years of the course. As a concerned citizen, I am eager to learn more about the climate crisis, and I would greatly appreciate it if there was an optional module offered to all students each term addressing different aspects of sustainability. The University of Manchester certainly has a brilliant opportunity to empower students to work towards a green revolution and they must take it!"

MATTHEW, THIRD YEAR MENG STUDENT

"I studied BSc International Business, Finance and Economics and sustainability was rarely mentioned throughout my degree. This is troubling as large businesses are consistently the worst polluters of our environment. If we want a viable future, I believe we must embed sustainability into all of our business practices. It's a shame that the next generation of business leaders are not being taught to see this as a priority and I worry about what this means for our planet."

**SARAH, THIRD YEAR BSC INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS,
FINANCE AND ECONOMICS STUDENT**

WHAT'S UoM MISSING? (CONTINUED)

“The Climate Crisis is the ultimatum 12-year challenge of our time. It is so complex and interlinked with other social/cultural/political struggles that sometimes you could feel so powerless. Even if you know what you can change at your level (like reducing plastic packaging, changing your diet and not fly,...), the reality is, 60% of global emissions are made by corporations and industries funded by global institutions and banks. These are which a lot of our students aim to get employed in and seek for better social and employable mobility. Embedding the Climate Crisis in the curriculum is not simply about behavioural change - but empowerment of a future workforce and generation as a whole, that know the challenges faced by their very own field and know how to collaborate creatively between them: engineers, artists, economists, politicians, sociologists - you name it! The truth is: the change we can make is proportional to the time we spent doing it, what better way to do this than in our full-time jobs? And what better way to start this at the seed of your careers - University of Manchester and 140 courses to deliver.”

**LAETITIA ALEXANDRATOS, EDUCATION OFFICER
AT THE STUDENTS UNION MANCHESTER**

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Although the University has developed a Sustainable Resources Plan and a Living Campus Plan outlining goals across different areas, this information could be made more accessible to students. Prior to writing this handbook, we had little knowledge about the University’s 2022 targets, and we are highly motivated. What’s it like for people who don’t (yet) care that much?

To increase accountability, more students have to become aware of the commitments made by the University, so they can help evaluate the annual progress reports. The University should reflect on ways in which this information could be made more accessible to students. For instance, the detailed 20-page reports on climate action should also be complemented by a short one-page summary documenting the goals and how we reach them (focus on the action, eliminate the rhetoric). Short videos should be made (they don’t have to be slick, but they do have to exist).