

PART 3:
Climate Action

THERE IS NO ONE KIND OF 'ACTIVIST'

“So, are you a climate activist?” is a question I have been asked on multiple occasions. After I say “yes”, the follow-up question is almost always, *“Oh, but isn’t it dangerous to protest? I mean, don’t you run the risk of getting arrested?”*. I shake my head in dismay. There are many negative connotations or misconceptions attached to the word “activist.” The truth is - there are multiple different ways to engage in climate activism. In this section, we break down some of the ways you can be involved in climate action work.

CLICKTIVISM

You’ve probably promoted and shared a cause on social media. This is a form of activism you can engage in anywhere - as long as you have access to the internet and a digital platform. Clicktivism is not just about signing and promoting a cause, but it also includes organising protests, sharing important perspectives that are underrepresented in mainstream media, and sparking conversations online.



PETITIONING

This includes both online and offline petitions. You can sign and support a petition by someone else, or you can start your own petition, if there is a particular cause that you think hasn’t been given due attention. For instance, we at CEM have started our own petition to get a Seventh Scrutiny Committee, dedicated to climate policy, in Manchester. We collected signatures at pre-covid 19 events, and now we are experimenting different ways of using online platforms to communicate the objectives behind our cause and why it’s important to us.

You can find more information about this on page 42. You will see our “Sign the Climate Petition” poster, complete with QR code, on notice boards and windows across campus.

SETTING UP ETHICAL SOCIAL ENTERPRISES/BUSINESSES

Creating ethical social enterprises or businesses is a great way to channel your passion for sustainability while also offering other like-minded people the chance to get involved, rethink their lifestyle choices and express their support for the cause you are passionate about. It’s a form of activism because you are able to bring about community change in a creative and fun way, and you might also inspire others to start their own ethical social enterprises.

CONVERSATIONS

You might wonder, does starting a conversation on climate change really make you a climate activist? Well, yes, if you decide to raise important issues, and do it consistently. Education is a big part of empowerment. And remember, conversing with people is a skill that you need to practice over and over and over again because it is very easy for people to dismiss the urgency of climate change, or resort to full-fledged climate denial. Some conversations will be difficult and others will be (surprisingly) easy. But persistence is key.

MARCHING

Climate strikes are increasingly common due to sheer ineptitude of international, national and local climate action. Several groups such as Youth Strike Manchester and Fridays for Future organise climate protests. You will probably see these protests advertised on campus flyers, on social media or by word of mouth. Marches are usually an organised and safe way to support a cause.



If you're unsure or anxious about marching for the first time, consider asking a friend or joining a society that is involved in climate action. It's also important to remember that marches are not something that everyone is able to participate in- there are many other ways you can get involved in climate activism if marching is not something that is always accessible for you.

REPORT WRITING/BLOGGING

Do you think your local council is handling the climate emergency well? Do you think people would change their meat-intensive diets if they knew more about the realities of industrial farming? Can you articulate your arguments more powerfully in writing? Good news - report writing and blogging on climate change issues makes you an activist. Whether you offer a new perspective, or critique a news story, you are contributing to the public discourse on climate change. It doesn't matter if many people view your post or agree with your viewpoint - what's important is that you are actively investing your time in learning, sharing and producing knowledge. And we really need more people to do that.



NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION (NVDA)

A simple definition for this is public forms of protest. Marching is a form of direct action, but there are other examples that may also be more extreme- think Greenpeace climbing the Shard in London, or Extinction Rebellion's civil disobedience protests. The reason why non-violent direct action can be so contentious is because those who involve themselves in it often have to be willing to put themselves up for arrest.

Not everyone is able to do this "safely" of course - factors such as race, gender identity, nationality or disability, this is not always a safe option for many activists. If you do not want or are unable to participate in NVDA, there are many other avenues of climate activism you can participate in that are just as valid and meaningful. If you do decide to participate in NVDA, make sure you get advice beforehand, either from friends already involved in activist organisations or from resources provided by the groups organising the events you are attending- you can find some NVDA legal resources in the activist list on page 51.

NO ONE KIND OF ACTIVIST (CONTINUED)

OCCUPYING OFFICES TO FORCE THE POWERS-THAT-BE INTO DIALOGUE

Another form of NVDA, occupation of buildings or infrastructure is a powerful strategy of protest. We asked Fritha Heaven and Daniel Johnson, two students involved in the prolonged and ultimately successful People & Planet Divestment Campaign to share their perspective on successful student occupations:

“Student occupations have the ability to be incredibly powerful in campaigns, however they do have limitations. The main problem being that there is nothing that can follow an occupation that would be capable of creating the same- or a larger- effect. This is why groups should see occupations as the final action they can take and should spend time making themselves and their demands well known by their University before carrying one out. Additionally, this build up time can be used to create excitement for the campaign and attract media interest and support from a wider group of students who may wish to become involved themselves.”



People & Planet's Fossil Free Campaign ran for around 10 years, yet the build up for the November 2019 occupation began in September 2018. This involved recruiting new members, running smaller actions to introduce the campaign, and working up to more dramatic actions such as disrupting board meetings before finally beginning the occupation.

A further thing to consider when thinking of running an occupation is the aims and objectives for the occupation. This is important because occupations lose impact over time, because the University learns how to function around you. Therefore, being clear about what your intentions for being there are from the start can help the chances of the occupation being successful.”

HOLDING (ENGAGING) MEETINGS

As an introvert, facilitating meetings is the stuff of nightmares. If you can retain the attention of an entire group of people, maintain decorum, facilitate discussions on climate change, and end the meeting with a clear plan for future action - congrats, you're an activist! And a wizard! Mobilising people to take action about anything, but especially climate change, is harder than it looks.

GETTING INVOLVED WITH YOUR STUDENT'S UNION

Student's Unions are often thought of as places to grab food or join a society. Many students aren't really aware of what a "union" is for. The student's union really exists to hold the university to account on issues of student experience, wellbeing and rights. There is a lot of campaigning work that goes on at SUs which you can get involved in voluntarily through joining a campaigning society, attending senate or joining a committee. You could even run for an elected position. It should be mentioned there is a great deal of bureaucracy involved in working within an SU and especially when holding university leadership (e.g. vice chancellors/boards of governors) to account. We give advice on dealing with bureaucracy later on (see page 46)



Again, this is NOT an exhaustive list. Whatever way you choose to invest your time and energy to take action on climate change, remember that your activism is still valid, necessary and important.