

Student Sustainability Guide

Welcome to the Student Sustainability Guide! The University of York Students' Union has produced this guide to give you some advice and resources on how you can participate in more sustainable actions during your time at university. This guide also sets out the context of climate change, why sustainability is so important, and provides links to other sustainability and climate action projects going on around campus. We hope it will be useful for you.

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DISCLAIMER:

This guide is here to give you an idea of things you can do as an individual, and that you can encourage others around you to do too (e.g. your coursemates, your sports teammates, other people in your societies). Taking lots of little actions can help with feelings of overwhelm. In the face of a problem as big and as global as climate change, making small changes breaks the problem down into something more manageable and can help us feel less stuck. Plus, if whole groups of people take up lots of little actions, it really adds up!

However, individual changes need to be matched by changes to the wider system, too. It is no one person's responsibility to fix climate change. These suggestions are meant to be taken up alongside wider changes in our governments, our industries, and our institutions. Students are not responsible for fixing climate change all on their own— this guide is only one part of much wider action. You can read more about what the University of York is doing to mitigate climate change [on their Sustainability webpages](#), and you can read more about what we as a Union are doing [on our Sustainability webpages](#).

The Context of Climate Change

The climate and nature crisis

Climate change is a global crisis driven by human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes. Since the industrial revolution, greenhouse gas emissions have been rising at a historically unprecedented rate. Approaches to energy use, land use, consumption and production have transformed and intensified accumulating in complex global systems that are not only emitting increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions but are also negatively impacting a host of other complex and interrelated environmental systems such as forests, soil health and biodiverse ecosystems. The consequences of this are already being experienced today around the globe.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change produces in-depth reports synthesising the latest evidence on climate change. It's a great place to go to get reliable, up-to-date assessments. You can read any of their reports on the [IPCC's website](#). [The Carbon Brief](#) is an alternative source of reliable information on climate change, its articles focus on delivering the latest developments in climate science and policy in an accessible way that everyone can understand.

Climate change and justice

The climate and nature crisis is more complex than carbon emissions and resource depletion, it is caused by global systems of inequality and exploitation. As a result, the burden of climate change is not evenly distributed across the global population and it is increasingly evident that those with the least responsibility for climate change are those who are most impacted by its consequences.

The richest 10% of the world population is responsible for almost half of the world's total lifestyle consumption emissions (this means emissions that are produced by the clothes we wear, the food we eat, etc.). Meanwhile, the poorest 50% of the world's population is

responsible for only around 7% of the world's total lifestyle consumption emissions. That means that for those of us living in a country like the UK, which has a much higher average income and a much higher average amount of goods consumed than countries in the Global South, changing our habits really will make a massive difference to the climate crisis.

The disparity in the burden of climate change doesn't just refer to the millions of people living in the global south. The younger generations right here in the UK, including those currently studying here at York, are highly likely to witness the consequences of ecosystem collapse in their lifetimes. The burden of climate change and its expected impacts can weigh heavy on younger generations and the injustice created by generational legacies of pollution and emissions must not be forgotten.

Climate Change and the University of York

The IPCC recommends that in order to ensure a sustainable and livable future for all, we need:

- Deep, rapid and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions
- A greater focus on adaptation to the effects of climate change (e.g. flood barriers)
- More emphasis on equitable solutions
- Scaled up financing
- Enhanced technology and international cooperation

These actions need to take place across whole societies and, for them to work, they need to be led by governments and institutions. Universities have a powerful role to play in tackling climate change— from researching climate solutions, to fostering international cooperation through study.

A 2023 study conducted by the University of York Students' Union found that 83% of York students who participated in the study are worried or extremely worried about climate change. We want to ensure that students are supported with the resources and tools they need to be able to take action in face of this anxiety. It's important that as a University community we rise to the challenge of these student concerns and ensure we are all doing what we can to address climate change.

The attitudes and values of the general public will shape how governments, institutions, and businesses respond to the climate crisis. This doesn't just have to happen through signing petitions and joining demonstrations (although those can play an important role too!). Even on a more daily basis, seeking more sustainable options when you're doing your food shopping, booking a holiday, or refreshing your wardrobe, sends a clear message to companies that the public wants to see sustainability at the top of the agenda.

Making small changes in your life may feel like too little to make a difference, but when you consider the domino effect it can have by encouraging others around you to do the same, it is a very important tool in our toolbox to fight climate change. This guide is here to help you evaluate ways you can live more sustainably as a student at York and signpost you to the resources and support available to help make this happen.

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is about building a healthy and balanced relationship between environmental and human systems. You may have heard the terms 'social sustainability' and 'environmental sustainability' before. These refer to this idea that sustainability is not just about the natural environment. It's about ensuring ecological *and* human wellbeing. In other words, sustainability is about **people and planet**.

Environmental sustainability is just one half of what sustainability means. It refers to practices that will reduce the negative impacts of human activity on the environment, as well as increasing the use of practices that have positive impacts.

Social sustainability is the other half of sustainability: it's about ensuring that our communities and societies can thrive in a healthy and equitable way.

Environmental and social sustainability overlap a lot. This is because people need a healthy environment in order to thrive, so things that are good for the environment are often good for people too. For example, a community that needs clean drinking water will therefore make sure that local rivers and lakes are protected from pollution. Moreover, given that the impacts of environmental damage and climate change and the ability to adapt to these impacts are

unevenly distributed, a more sustainable future for all cannot be achieved without a concerted effort to ensure sustainability initiatives are intersectional and committed to addressing inequality and injustice.

Improving social sustainability often has the additional effect of improving environmental sustainability, and vice versa.

[The UN's definition of sustainable development](#) is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. When we talk about people’s needs, we’re including natural resources like clean drinking water, healthy soil to grow food, and unpolluted seas to fish from. But people also need resources like healthcare, housing, and education. **Sustainable development means finding ways to meet all of these needs in a way that doesn’t harm either people or the planet.**

It can be helpful to bear these principles in mind, when thinking about the ways you could try and be more sustainable in your own life.

‘The Sustainable Six’: six easy things you can do to be a more sustainable student

1. Plan your food shopping

Planning your food shopping can help you and the planet! Food systems (that means the growth, production, transportation and disposal of our food) accounts for just over 30% of total global emissions and a recent 2023 study found that half of those emissions result from food waste. Plus, research estimates that students are spending £273 a year on food that ends up going in the bin! So, shopping smarter can help you save money and reduce your emissions. Here are a few tips:

- Meal planning can help you reduce your waste as you only buy what you know you will need for your meals.

- Bulk buying wholefoods is cheaper and better for the environment.
- Batch cooking is more time and energy efficient and also could save you money on those energy bills.
- Make use of food waste apps like [Too Good to Go](#) or [Olio](#)
- Check out the student-run food store, [SCOOP](#), a non-profit sustainable food co-operative.

[Visit the cost of living hub for more tips and tricks!](#)

2. Shop vintage and second hand

Fast fashion is responsible for nearly 10% of all global emissions, that's nearly five times greater than the emissions from the aviation industry. Shopping second hand and vintage means you're breaking out of the fast fashion cycle, reducing your own carbon footprint and also sending a consumer signal that fashion needs to become more sustainable.

Here are a few ways you can move away from fast fashion:

- The student group '[Swap Don't Shop](#)' runs regular clothing swaps on campus
- Consider selling your clothes on apps like [Vinted](#) or [Depop](#), or donating them to a charity shop
- When you need a new item try and check second hand sources first, like browsing the second hand shopping apps or doing a quick sweep of your local charity shops. It could save you money too!
- There's a full list of all the charity shops in York available on the [York Recycling Service Website](#).

3. Save energy

Our lifestyles in the Global North are very energy intensive. For example, the average person living in Britain consumes twice as much energy as the average person living in Brazil. Try to be mindful of your energy usage and look for ways to reduce it - keeping an eye on your electricity, gas and water bills can save you money as well!

Why not consider taking part in the [Student Switch Off](#) and the [YorEnergy Competition](#) to take your energy saving even further.

4. Be Transport Conscious

Travelling by car produces nearly three times more carbon per kilometre than travelling by bus and seven times more than travelling by train. Cycling can reduce your emissions even further. Here are a few tips for sustainable travel in and around York:

- There are student offers for bus travel in York which you can find out about via the [First Bus website](#).
- The University of York provides free bike maintenance through their '[Bike Doctor](#)' [sessions](#) on campus.
- Check out the local bike shop [Recycle York](#) for discounted second hand bikes.
- Familiarise yourself with maps of the city and the relatively short walking routes from Campus to the City Centre. This can help reduce your carbon footprint whilst also improving your fitness!
- If you travel by train, national rail offers [railcards](#) that can get you up to 30% off some rail fares.

5. Go Reusable

Single use items like coffee cups and plastic bottles are rarely recycled properly, even when they are made of recyclable materials. By investing in some reusable alternatives you can reduce the amount of waste you are sending to landfill.

- Join the [YORCUP scheme](#). Buy a YORCUP from any cafe outlet on campus, get your first drink free, discounts on all your drinks, and reduce from single use cups!
- Through the [BottleUp campaign](#), the University offers free reusable water bottles for all Freshers living on campus.
- Once again, the student-led refill shop [SCOOP](#) is a great resource for plastic-free food shopping!
- Have a look to see if there are any [zero waste shops in your area](#).

6. Recycle

Even when we reduce and reuse as much as we can, it's inevitable that we will sometimes have to purchase new items or single use items. Recycling allows us to go some way to mitigating the impact that our purchases make.

If you live on campus, make sure you're up to date on what can and cannot be recycled. [All the information you need is provided by the University.](#)

If you live off campus, you can refer to the [York City Council's guidance on recycling.](#)

Student Group Sustainability

Student groups, including societies, sports clubs, and volunteering groups, all have a role to play in improving the sustainability of campus life. Below are some suggested steps you can take, but remember that even just raising awareness of climate issues amongst your peers can have a significant impact.

1. Reduce waste

Our regular activities can generate a lot of avoidable waste, reflecting on how your group could make small changes to its activities can be a really great way to cut your environmental impact and carbon footprint. For example, you could:

- Minimise single-use materials (for example, date-specific paper handouts for events)
- Reduce the amount of waste left over from your activities and/or choose recyclable materials.
- Encourage students not to buy new goods just for a one-off event (for example, if you're running a themed costume social, encourage your members to have a look around York's many charity shops for an outfit– rather than buying new clothes that will only be worn once)

2. Cut transport emissions

If your group does a lot of travelling to and from events, changing how you travel could be really impactful. Where possible, try using public transport to get to events. Or, if you're travelling to a sports fixture with other York teams, consider trying to arrange a shared coach to minimise carbon emissions– and bear in mind that it may well save you money, too!

You can read more about how to make use of our transport service provisions on the [York SU Student Resource Hub](#).

3. Improve accessibility

Sustainability within your student group extends beyond reducing your environmental impact, remember to think about the social sustainability of your group too, like considering ways to make your group more accessible.

- Check out the [Accessibility Guide to Student Activities](#) and the student [Equality and Diversity Training](#).

- Use [AccessAble](#) to check the accessibility of any in-town venues.
- Refer to the [York SU Student Leader Handbook](#) to complete an Equality Impact Assessment, if your group hasn't already done so.

Remember that environmental actions can have negative social impacts. For example, removing plastic straws may be environmentally good, but is exclusionary to people who need straws for accessibility reasons. When in doubt, ask around for advice and get in touch with [our Union Sabbatical Officers](#) for support!

4. Collaborate

Collaboration with other student groups can help improve the environmental and social sustainability of your group. Collaborating with a group with environmental expertise could help your group get more involved in environmental sustainability events or projects. More broadly, collaboration with other student groups to run any kind of event or project can help build interpersonal connections and bring about the cultural transformation we need to achieve holistic sustainability.

Building relationships with other student groups can also help on a more practical level: you can look into sharing things like equipment with each other, rather than buying new things that are unlikely to be reused.

Collaboration can extend beyond work with other student groups, consider using your group's collective power to [fundraise or volunteer for charitable causes](#).

5. Get creative

Think about your usual group activities— could they be repurposed for social good? Perhaps a regular arts and crafts activity could make something that your local community needs— birdhouses? Scarves? Get creative!

Sustainable Development Grant

The University of York Students' Union offers a Sustainable Development Grant to all students and staff at the university. You can apply for the grant as an individual or as part of a group and its purpose is to ensure you have the funding you need to take a lead in sustainability on campus.

What is the grant for?

The Grant funds initiatives that improve sustainability at York. The Grant projects are assessed against the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals, so as long as your project addresses one or more of these 17 goals, it could be eligible for funding!

The Sustainable Development Goals are broad reaching and so there is plenty of room for creativity and we are keen to fund a wide range of student led projects with both environmental and social sustainability goals. Projects can be funded up to £1000 as long as you can evidence how the money would be put towards furthering sustainable development in York.

How to apply.

You can submit a grant application [via this google form](#). If you have any problems accessing or using this form, please contact Connor Briggs on c.briggs@yorksu.org.

What happens when you are awarded a grant?

If your grant application is successful you will be assigned a staff member from either the Student's Union or the University of York to help you throughout your project. They will help ensure that progress and outcomes are monitored and that your project is a success!

Unsure about the grant process or looking for some guidance around applying?

If you have any questions about the Grant, or about student sustainability more generally, you can contact the Students' Union Sustainability Coordinator, Eliza Taswell-Fryer, at e.taswellfryer@yorksu.org.

What Else is Going On?

There are lots of other ways to get involved with climate and sustainability action on campus. Here is a list of other things you could look into!

University of York

The [University of York Sustainability web pages](#) provide lots of information on what the University is doing to be more sustainable, as well as information on ways that you can get involved.

The University also produces a [monthly newsletter](#) outlining upcoming sustainability events, resources, volunteering opportunities, and other useful information for staff and students interested in climate action.

The University of York Students' Union Sustainability Hub

[This page](#) is a great first port of call for finding out more about what we as a Union are doing to be more sustainable and information on how you can get involved. We'll be adding more resources and information as our sustainability work develops.

Student-led sustainability

There are loads of student societies and volunteering groups that focus on climate and sustainability issues. We've produced a list of sustainability related groups you can get involved with on our [sustainability page](#).

Each of York's 11 colleges have an elected Environment and Ethics Officer as part of their committees— you can get in touch with yours, or consider running for the role yourself.

Further sustainability opportunities

The [Student Sustainability Opportunities Hub](#) is a great place to find out more about the modules, courses, internships and volunteering opportunities related to sustainability that are available to you as a York student.

There are also loads of opportunities to get involved with sustainability initiatives in York outside of the University.

- [Resilience Web](#) is a website that lists volunteering opportunities related to sustainability.
- To stay connected with the projects, people and organisations tackling the climate crisis in York, sign up to the [York Climate Connect mailing list](#).

Resources

Books

- **The Climate Book** - *Greta Thunberg*
A compilation of mini-articles / essays written by world-renowned experts on the subject of climate change. If you're going to read one book about climate change, make it this one.
- **A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety: How to Keep Your Cool on a Warming Planet** - *Sarah Jaquette Ray*
An 'existential toolkit' for dealing with apathy, burnout, and eco-guilt in the climate movement.
- **Fighting in a World on Fire** - *Andreas Malm*
An introduction to the principles of climate activism, specifically written for young people.
- **No-one is Too Small to Make a Difference** - *Greta Thunberg*
A collection of Greta Thunberg's speeches.
- **As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonisation to Standing Rock** - *Dina Gilio-Whitaker*
The story of Native peoples' resistance to environmental injustice and land incursions, and a call for environmentalists to learn from the Indigenous community's rich history of activism.
- **Braiding Sweetgrass** - *Robin Wall-Kimmerer*
A nonfiction book about the role of Indigenous knowledge as an alternative or complementary approach to Western mainstream scientific methodologies.
- **The Shock of the Anthropocene** - *Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz*
A scientific and historical view on the Earth's current geological epoch: the Anthropocene, and explores paths for surviving this volatile era.
- **Fossil Capital** - *Andreas Malm*
An economic and political history on the rise of steam power and the roots of global warming.
- **The Decade We Could Have Stopped Climate Change** - *Nathaniel Rich*
The story of how the scientific evidence of climate change was politically denied in the West, and an overview of the damage that will occur as a result.
- **Feral** - *George Monbiot*
A journalistic exploration of the case for 'rewilding' Britain's landscape, and the impact it will have on our culture and society by doing so.

- **The Book of Rewilding: A Practical Guide to Rewilding, Big and Small** - *Isabella Tree*
A handbook for anyone interested in helping restore nature.
- **It's not that Radical: Climate Action to Transform Our World** - *Mikaela Loach*
 - An exploration of how climate action could look if climate justice was put at its core. An insightful exploration at the important overlap between the social and the environmental.

Further resources

Podcasts, social media pages, blogs and more to help keep you inspired and informed.

Podcasts:

- **Optimism and Outrage:** covering all things climate change and climate action, this podcast tries to address the challenges of climate change with an optimistic, solutions-focused approach.
- **A Matter of Degrees:** hosted by Dr Katherine Wilkinson and Dr Leah Stokes this podcast tackles climate and sustainability across the globe through interviews with climate leaders.
- **The Nature Podcast:** for those keen to stay up-to-date with the latest research, The Nature Podcast from the academic journal Nature interviews the scientists behind Nature's latest publications.
- **Wo(men) Mind the Water:** this podcast uses storytelling and art to explore the relationship between women and water and how this relationship is being impacted by climate change.
- **The Sustainable Law Podcast:** for those studying, or with an interest in, the legal sector this podcast explores how the climate and nature crisis is impacting law and what the profession can do to contribute towards sustainability.
- **Liberating Sustainability:** hosted by Students Organising for Sustainability, this podcast takes an intersectional approach to exploring climate change, interviewing student liberation leaders on issues related to sustainability and liberation.
- **The Joy Report:** this podcast explores climate solutions and environmental justice movements happening right now, with a focus on intersectional environmentalism.

Blogs and social media pages:

- The Carbon Brief: a website covering all the latest developments in climate science and policy and a good place to go to keep up with the latest research presented in a digestible way.
- The Woodland Trust Climate Change Blog: a great place to go for all things nature and conservation in the UK.
- The Elders Intergenerational Climate Blog: A series of conversations between young and old climate activists.
- @youthclimatesave: founded by youth activist Genesis Butler this youth-led page focuses on raising awareness of the link between animal agriculture and climate change.
- @earthalliance: explores the intersection between nature, culture and climate with an aim to rewild the world.
- @intersectionalenvironmentalist: this page was founded by Leah Thomas and showcases the work of intersectional environmentalists across the globe.
- @UNEP: this is the official page for the United Nations Environment Programme and a great way to stay up to date with their research and campaigns.
- @c40cities: if you have an interest in urban sustainable living, C40 Cities is a group of nearly 100 cities across the globe who have come together to rise to the challenge of climate change.
- @autumn.peltier: Autumn Peltier is a young indigenous rights activist and creator of The Water Walker Documentary.