

INTRODUCING STUDENTS ORGANISING FOR SUSTAINABILITY UK



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM

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Over summer 2019, in response to the climate emergency and ecological crisis, student officers and staff at NUS founded Students Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS-UK) so we can go further and faster with NUS' transformational sustainability work.

The three things that make SOS-UK different from our partners are:

- We are an **education charity focusing on sustainability** (rather than a sustainability charity working on education)
- We work on sustainability across **all forms of education** (most work in either pre-16 or post-16 education)
- We **engage everyday students** in sustainability, not just established campaigners, supporting students wherever they are on their sustainability journey and creating a pathway for young people to go on and engage with other organisations.

SOS-UK has separate governance and is financially independent from NUS though we work closely in partnership with the NUS president serving as one of the three founding trustees and NUS providing SOS-UK with operational support and facilities.

WHAT WE WANT TO CHANGE

We want to **liberate teaching on sustainability** from its current subject silos. In schools and sixth-form colleges sustainability is seen as a science or geography topic and many disciplines in further and higher education fail to include it. This is leading students to think that sustainability is for certain types of students, rather than a mainstream issue that affects us all. We want to **break the cycle of well-educated people making bad decisions** for the planet. As David Orr (the US activist academic) says, our education system is routinely equipping people to be more effective vandals of the planet. Our environmental charities are constantly fighting bad decision-making by well educated people, and that must change.

We want to **change society's fixation on self-interest and short-term profit** to plurality and long-term prosperity. We see the education system as the best starting point from which to do this.

OUR WORKSTREAMS

1. **Getting more students leading on, and learning for, sustainability.** When students lead on sustainability they develop the knowledge, values, skills, and competencies required to make

them great sustainability leaders. We don't just want organisations to do sustainability *for* students, it should be done *by, with, and through* students.

2. **Repurposing the education system around the climate emergency and ecological crisis.** Sustainability should be woven through every subject like a golden thread. Every student should be a sustainability student. The education system should serve as a force for good in response to the challenges society faces.
3. **Making sustainability more inclusive**, so it is for everyone. Our [2018 research](#) showed that the sustainability sector is massively underrepresented in racial diversity. The negative impacts of sustainability inaction disproportionately affect BAME people and women, both globally and here in the UK. The sector must represent these voices.

OUR ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Our sustainability engagement programmes reach a broad range of students, including those who may not typically be engaged in such activities, and we often see these students progress on a pathway through their own, or through our, campaigns and programmes. With the exception of My World My Home and Students for Trees, all our engagement programmes were developed by a student or a local group of students. A big part of our work is to find and support students with good ideas, helping them find funding so they can extend their reach. Very often these students work for us for a while and then leave their projects for us to manage and develop, as has been the case for Green Impact, Student Switch Off, Student Eats, Responsible Futures, and For Good. All our sustainability engagement programmes are led locally by students, supported by us, in keeping with our aim of getting more students leading on, and learning for, sustainability. Through our programmes we create change here and now, whilst our campaigns aim to shift the education system as a whole.

- [Student Switch Off](#) - our inter-dormitory competition that gets students engaged in sustainability through friendly competition. This year we are running it in 120,000 student rooms across 7 European countries (funded by universities, plus an EU grant). We have run Student Switch Off since 2007.
- [Green Impact](#) - our environmental accreditation scheme for staff to improve the sustainability of their workplaces bottom-up, supported by trained students. This year we have trained 900 students (funded by participating workplaces). We have run Green Impact since 2008.
- [Student Eats](#) - our sustainable food programme that works with students and staff to create a more equitable food system by putting healthy and sustainable food and food growing at the heart of university and college campuses across the UK. We have supported over 70 food growing sites and with National Lottery Community Funding have supported the establishment of over 60 student-led food enterprises. We have run Student Eats since 2014.
- [Responsible Futures](#) - our accreditation framework for embedding the teaching of sustainability through a whole-institution approach. This embeds sustainability learning through the formal, informal, and subliminal curriculum. To date, 30 universities and colleges have participated. In partnership with their students' union, representing over 500,000 students (funded by participating universities and colleges). We have run Responsible Futures since 2014.

- [For Good](#) - our platform which supports students to make their coursework, projects and dissertations more than just an academic exercise. We match local charities and small businesses with students, so their research delivers community and sustainability benefit (funded by the local charities and businesses). We have run Dissertations for Good since 2016.
- [My World My Home](#) - our joint five-year project, with Friends of the Earth, working with students in 15 further education colleges, training them as community organisers and supporting them to identify, develop and run their own environmental campaigns (funded by the National Lottery Community Fund).
- [Students for Trees](#) - our joint project, with the Woodland Trust, supporting students to run projects planting and conserving trees locally as part of the nationwide Charter for Trees campaign (funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund).
- [Alcohol Impact](#) - our accreditation mark and change programme to promote responsible alcohol consumption and implement projects and policies to improve university culture around responsible drinking. We have run Alcohol Impact since 2014, when its pilot was funded by the Home Office.
- [Fairtrade Universities and Colleges](#) - our joint accreditation is run in partnership with the Fairtrade Foundation, engaging students and staff to embed trade justice principles in policies and campaigns, as well as to improve the provision of Fairtrade products on university and college campuses (funded by universities and colleges).

OUR SYSTEMS CHANGE CAMPAIGNS

Whilst our programmes work to engage staff and students in making positive change now, our campaigns work with partners and stakeholders to call for wider and more radical shifts across the education system. We develop these national campaigns centrally and then work with supportive student officers and campaigners to deliver them locally.

- [Teach the Future](#) - our joint campaign with UK Student Climate Network (UKSCN) to repurpose the English education system around the climate emergency and ecological crisis. We are supporting school pupils to run the campaign and we ran a successful parliamentary reception in February 2020. We have also drafted a [bill](#) and done some detailed costings for making all [educational buildings in England net-zero](#). The campaign has received significant [press coverage](#) and has the support of the two main teaching unions and all the major environmental charities.
- [Invest for Change](#) - our campaign, building on our successful [Divest-Invest](#) work, for universities to radically reform how they invest their money. Working with students' unions and student campaigners, we'll call on universities to invest in environmental and social justice solutions, engage with investments to influence wider corporation change and adopt radical responsible investment policies that support a sustainable future.
- Carbon targets - our campaign to get all UK university and colleges to commit to and deliver ambitious carbon targets to tackle the climate emergency. We are collecting and scoring institutional carbon reduction targets and creating a resource to easily see and compare targets across the sector. The campaign, run alongside NUS, delivers part of the '[Declaring a climate emergency](#)' policy, passed at NUS conference in 2020.
- [Farming for Carbon](#) - our new campaign to get universities to repurpose their landholdings to abate the climate emergency. Many universities have significant landholdings that are mostly rented to tenant farmers, and most of these are farmed intensively, depleting soils and

releasing carbon. We are working to develop an offset scheme for universities to pay into to cover the travel of international students and overseas academic research, with the money going to their tenant farmers to support them to farm in a no or low-till way to build up soil organic matter through the sequestration of carbon.

- [Mock COP26](#) - our global youth-led campaign, in collaboration with [SOS International](#), to fill the void of the postponed COP26 climate talks. Mock COP will be a big inclusive online event where young people from around the world will present their views on what ambitious global climate action should look like, culminating in a powerful but realistic statement and vision which would serve to raise ambition for COP26 in November 2021.

OUR RESEARCH

Our sustainability programmes and campaigns are supported by an evidence base of research, with our findings demonstrating the strong student demand for sustainability and helping us to find the most effective ways of driving positive change on sustainability. This research has been integral in developing our work across the education sector with our library of reports available online [here](#).

STAFFING AND GOVERNANCE

You can view the SOS-UK staff [team and organogram on our website here](#). Our three founding trustees are:

- [Richard Dunne](#) (SOS-UK Chair): A leading headteacher known for his work on Harmony Education, Richard is helping us extend our work into pre-16 education and advises us on Teach the Future.
- [Zamzam Ibrahim](#) (SOS-UK President): NUS President and Board Member of SOS-International, the new international charity founded the NUS's in Denmark, Ireland and the UK, working to get NUS's all over Europe collaborating on sustainability, Zamzam is the public face SOS-UK.
- [Sara Parkin](#): Co-founder of Forum for the Future and The European Greens, Sara is an expert in sustainability education and advises us on organisational management.