

Let's 'do different'

Planetary Citizen Education Proposal



BCAN

CHASE

CHERRPS

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BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK

Summary

BCAN, the Biodiversity and Climate Action Network, brings together students and staff at UEA committed to making UEA 'walk the talk' on the climate & biodiversity emergencies.

The BCAN "Climate Education" working group has developed a series of pragmatic proposals for improving climate education at UEA. These proposals are based on research on other universities' climate education work, on staff and student workshops (funded by the Chase Climate Justice Network) and on conversations with relevant bodies at UEA.

Implementing these proposals will require a moderate level of resource commitment from central management. Not committing these resources puts UEA at significant risk of further falling behind others in the sector. The proposals in this report can be implemented swiftly and mostly be slotted into existing structures. They should be a starting point for more fundamental reforms in the near future.

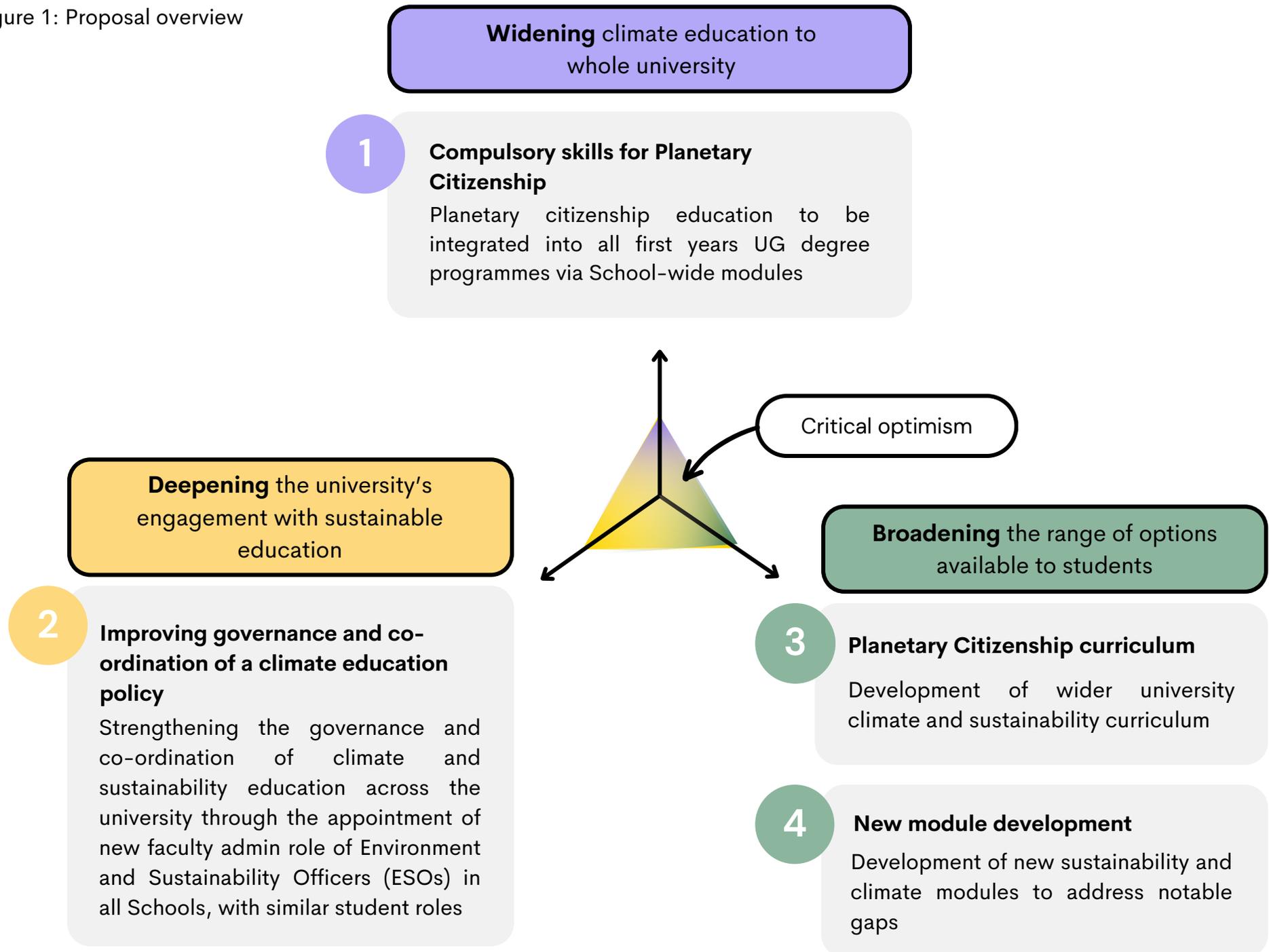
This reports proposes that UEA **widens**, **broadens**, and **deepens** its climate education offer, by taking the steps outlined in detail in the graphic on the next page.

The proposals in this report are based on a philosophy of **interdisciplinary critical optimism** that takes issues of climate avoidance and climate anxiety seriously, while equipping students with critical thinking skills and preparing them for taking action in the real world.

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Figure 1: Proposal overview



UEA is not leading in climate education. Other universities are miles ahead. It's time we catch up!

Universities are increasingly being challenged to show leadership in the climate crisis, and offering some form of climate or sustainability education - for all students - is seen as an important way to achieve this. According to the student campaign Teach the Future many students feel that they are not being taught about the climate crisis beyond courses like geography or the natural sciences.

The University of the West of England (UWE) has recently developed a Climate Education course available for all staff and students committed to preparing students to meet the challenges of climate change in the world [1]. While the University of Falmouth has financially supported students to create their own Ecological Citizenship course, available to all and encouraging collective learning, creative enquiry, world-making and helps to address eco-anxiety [2]. In more radical terms, a new higher education institute has been formed in the Brecon Beacons National Park, Wales and is offering degree programmes that combine both the practical skills and knowledge needed to equip students to become change-makers in a climate-changed world [3]. Other universities are offering a range of options like carbon literacy training, eco-anxiety courses and actively exploring how climate change education can be improved. This is not happening at UEA.

Yet, UEA is a historically renowned site of climate and environmental sciences and with diverse expertise across interdisciplinary Schools, this is an opportunity to bring true interdisciplinarity into UEA as a core and distinctive feature of teaching and learning.

The university ethos is '*do different*'. Why should we not be leading the climate education reform?

UEA's Biodiversity and Climate Action Network (BCAN) conducted some research with staff and students exploring what a campus-wide climate education might look for us ...



BCAN did

Members of BCAN have run 2 staff workshops and 4 student workshops throughout 2023 which explored how climate education might be expanded across the university. As well as discussing what the future of climate education may look like, the workshops also helped to map existing climate education across the UEA and identified some of the key issues and challenges around expanding our existing educational programmes.

[1] <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/greener-future/climate-education-course>

[2] <https://fxplus.ac.uk/ecological-citizen-course>

[3] <https://blackmountainscollege.uk>

BCAN found



1 Staff from a range of different Schools were supportive of the idea of university-wide climate education and were interested in integrating more climate-based content into their courses and modules. However, staff often felt isolated in this lacking the confidence, the knowledge, or the resources to make the changes happen.

2 Different perspectives and disciplines focus on the different ways climate-related content could be taught, both across the university and in specific courses. Staff from different schools also prioritise different things as important for students to learn (e.g. knowledge vs. skills, or more incremental vs. transformational changes).

3 The workshops highlighted that students are wary of climate-related content that feeds feelings of hopelessness and fails to empower students to become change-makers. Students are mostly aware of the challenges of climate change and want to know what they can do about it. Students are also keen to learn a wider set of skills and knowledges to live, act and remain hopeful in the planetary-wide climate crisis. Emerging evidence points to growing levels of climate avoidance and anxiety amongst students, an issue BCAN will explore further in a survey of students in the near future.

4 Our findings reinforce the need for a climate education (or even planetary citizenship) that supports students in engaging with – rather than avoiding – this emotionally challenging topic. Educational institutions have an important role to play in showing ways forward in this impasse and to teach, and demonstrate, action on individual, local and global scales.

5 No clear consensus emerged on how a university wide climate education could be delivered. One reason for this is that there are several institutional challenges (like timetabling, credit variances, and assessment) acting as administrative and structural barriers to implementing a campus-wide curriculum. These obstacles are not impossible to overcome, only they require significant institutional buy-in. There are various options for delivering relevant learning, as evidenced by the strategies already implemented by other universities that demonstrate how these issues can be addressed.

Philosophy of Planetary Citizenship: The Underlying Theory of Change

During our workshops with staff and students we learned about the content students and lecturers ask for. We are presenting key ideas discussed in the workshops which we placed on a 2-dimensional plane according to the nature of the content: from the knowledge to skills needed and mainstream to alternative.

While the few offers for sustainability and climate education for students at the moment are found in the top half of the matrix, we concluded that we should start in the centre of the 2x2 and work outwards into all directions over time. The following list of suggestions follows this principle.

- Include social science and humanities as well as natural science in all modules.
- Demonstrate that the framing of the problem and solutions are contested and support the students to develop critical thinking and reflexivity in relation to these.
- Contain epistemic plurality – different ways of knowing and understanding the climate crisis.
- Provide the opportunity to experiment with new pedagogies.

- Give students the ability to navigate the climate crisis in empowering and hopeful ways.
- To address issues of climate avoidance and climate anxiety, we are considering different module names and vocabulary to use e.g. ecological citizenship, transformation. Some universities (e.g. Falmouth) are adopting such practices too.

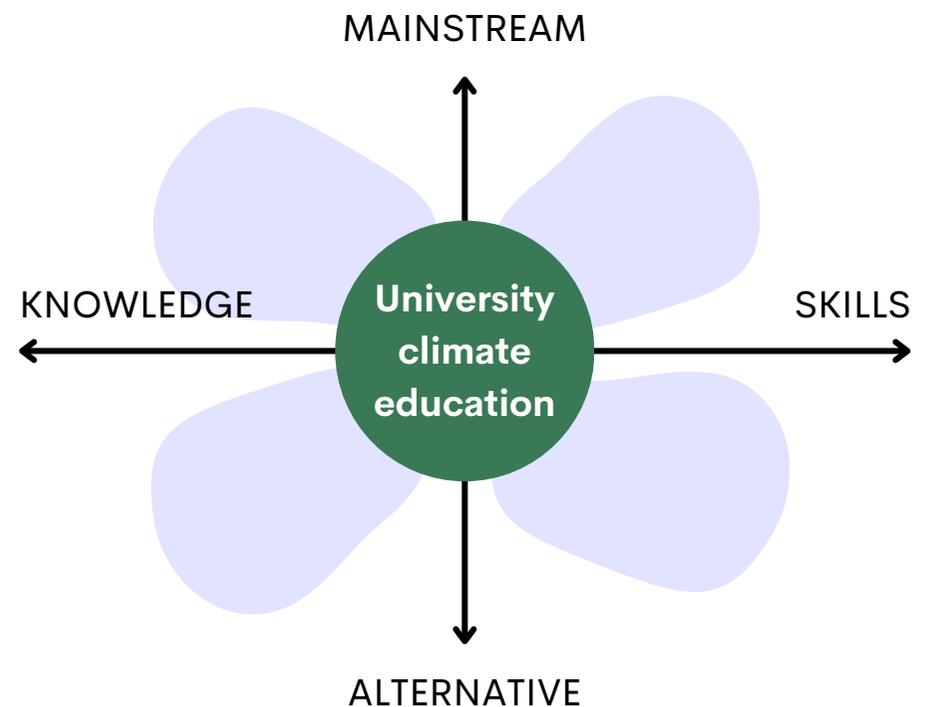
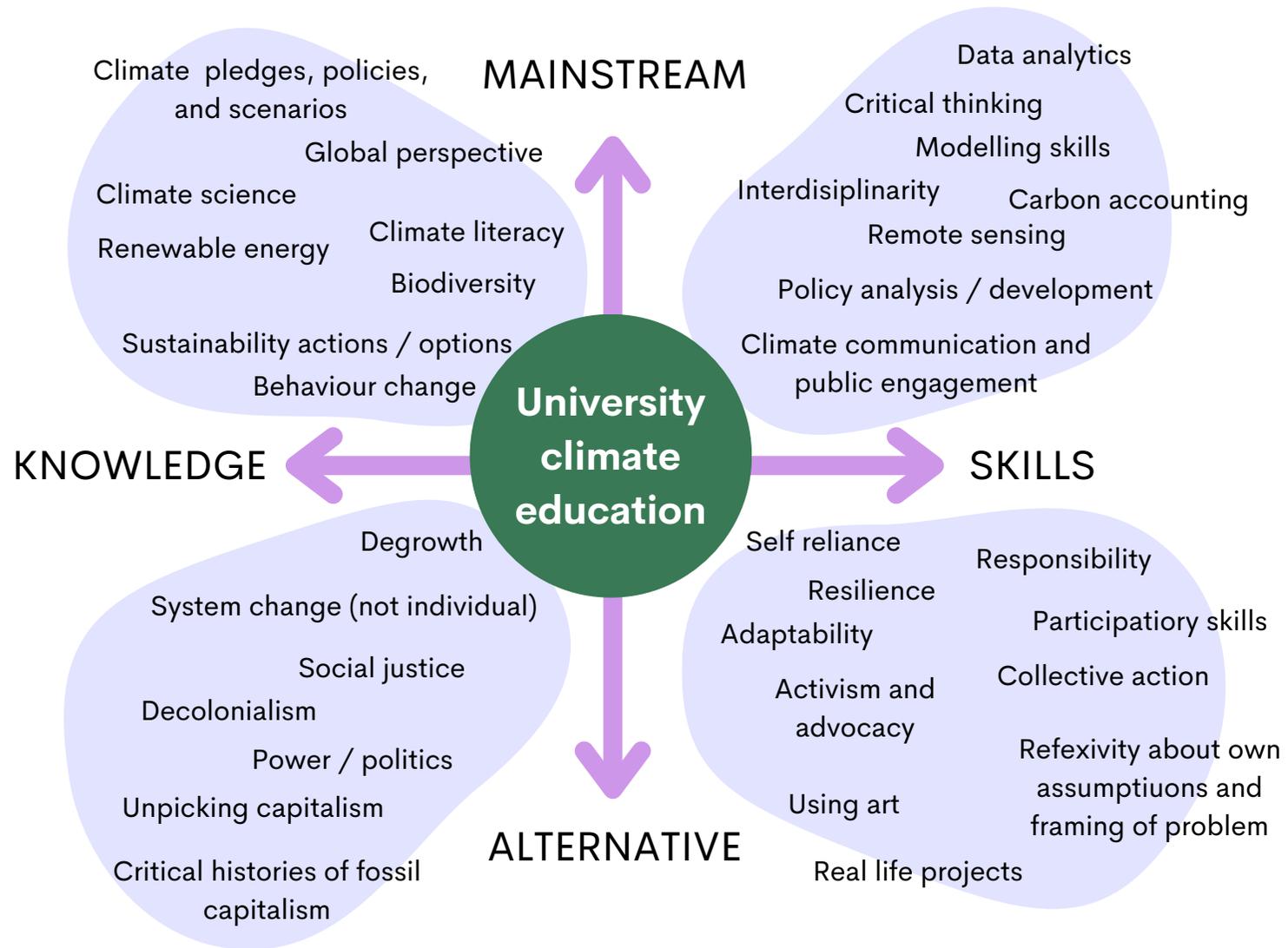


Figure 2: modified from Molthan-Hill, P. et al. (2019).

Figure 3: Educational content mapped onto the dimensions 'knowledge' to 'skill' and 'mainstream' to 'alternative'.



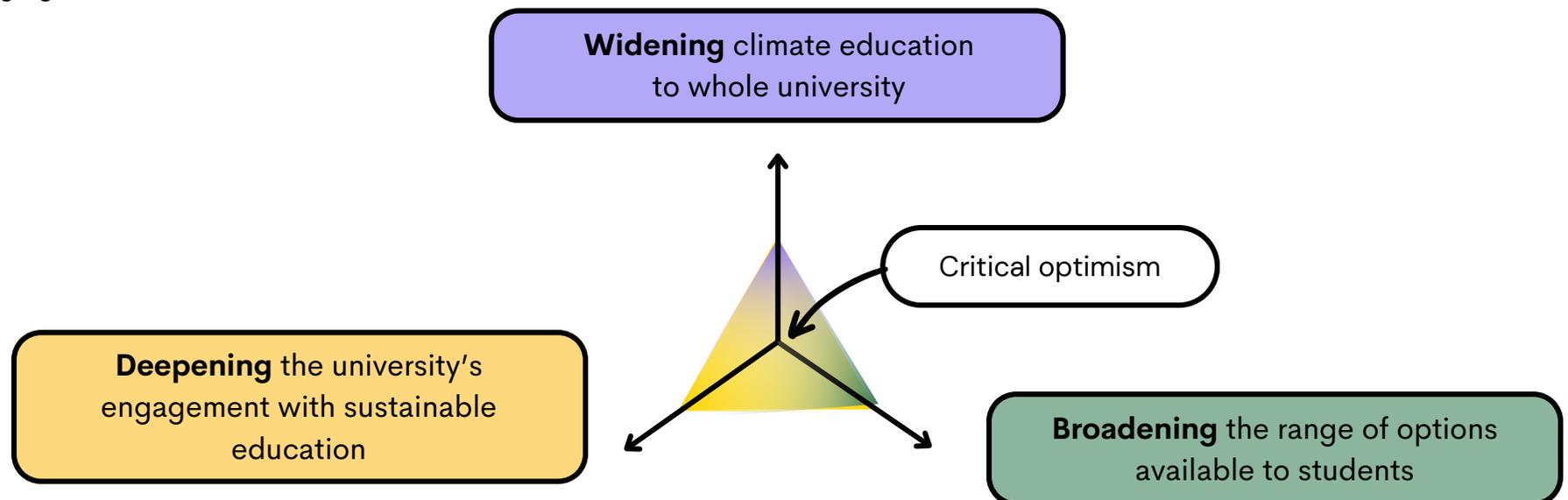
Climate education proposals

Following the workshops, we have developed a set of proposals that can act as a starting point for university-wide climate education at UEA. These are based on the philosophy of planetary citizenship outlined above and are intended to be impactful while causing minimal disruption to the existing structure of education at the UEA. In December 2023, we held an additional workshop with interested staff and students across the university to seek feedback on our proposals. The feedback from this has been incorporated into our recommendations.

Described below is an immediate set of recommendations that **we believe should be done as the bare minimum** and can be implemented now. However, we see the proposal only as a starting point for how to transform higher education towards keeping curricula flexible and up-to-date with current challenges in our ever changing world.

We are proposing for the UEA to tackle the lack of climate and sustainability education in three directions: **Widening** – integrating climate education in all courses, **Broadening** – increasing the offer of existing climate and sustainability related content to students, and **Deepening** – universities engagement with climate and sustainable education as a matter of educational and institutional policy.

Following discussion with students and staff, we are proposing the broad term 'Planetary Citizenship' to enable the content of the module to cover the interconnected planetary challenges we are facing in an interdisciplinary way. Our proposals have four key components.



Widening

1 Compulsory skills for planetary citizenship

Central to our proposal is the idea that 10 hours of core climate and sustainability education will be integrated into all first year undergraduate degree programmes via School-wide modules. This will provide a common foundation which then supports student progress in deepening their knowledge and skills in specific specialisms or disciplines. We recommend that:

- 10 hours within each first year UG degree: to be worked in where appropriate into existing modules (School ESOs to support this integration).
- The work would be delivered by 3 new posts entitled Planetary Citizenship Lecturers (PCL) form the Planetary Citizenship team employed on ATS contracts. The main focus on their skills profile is having expertise in climate change communication and being engaging lecturers. We envisage these positions being part of interdisciplinary, university-wide networks, e.g. ClimateUEA, and maintaining active links with relevant Schools, e.g. DEV, EDU, and ENV, to ensure access and collegiality with relevant expert colleagues. Their key responsibilities would be:
 - Developing and teaching the 10h Planetary Citizenship education module across different Schools
 - Supporting the ESOs in all Schools with adapting the module depending on the Schools needs
 - Signposting students and staff to existing resources
 - Supporting CHERPPS with the sustainability and climate education of faculty.
 - Explore other opportunities for sustainability education e.g. working with schools, summer schools, apprenticeships.

Overall, the content would be common to all students to provide core learning. How exactly it is delivered and integrated into modules in all courses is decided on an individual basis by PCLs and Environment and Heads of School / Teaching Directors. The intention is for this module to act as an introduction to climate and sustainability issues and to create a pathway for further modules that can be taken (see Universal Sustainability Curriculum below)

- There would be a light touch assessment to encourage engagement with the content. For example, a reflective 500 words on relation to their course, pass/fail, 10% of mark. This would be marked by the PCLs (exact assessment to be decided with individual Schools)
- Delivery of this content could, in part, adopt a flipped classroom model, where students engage with content on their own time before in-person workshops with the PCLs. Flipped classroom content can be delivered e.g. via the UEA developed RYZE App or other cutting-edge learning technology. The in-person component will focus on developing critical thinking & problem solving, communication, and citizenship and stewardship attributes.
- Integration of the 10h Planetary Citizenship module depends on the nature of the degree programme. Appropriate formats will be identified for professional courses (for example, on the MB BS MED, an optional Student Selective Component (SSC) in Greening up Global Health could be offered).

Deepening

2

Improving governance and co-ordination of a climate education policy

To embed sustainable and climate education across different Schools we suggest that all Schools appoint an Environment and Sustainability Officer (ESO) with allocated time in workload models. The ESO can act as a facilitator and operate in a network across the university. DEV has a model for environment officer roles which can be adapted for wider university use.

Details about the ESO role:

- ESOs' remit encompasses but is not limited to education
- ESOs have direct access to a bank of resources and knowledge, shared with other environment officers, potentially hosted on the library website & curated by the PCLs
- Act as a key point of contact for other parts of the university that need to disseminate sustainability-related information (e.g. Estates, SU).
- ESOs support colleagues who wish to learn more about climate change/future education and how to integrate it into their modules and teaching
- They are responsible for identifying gaps in offered education and are the contact person for new module ideas concerning biodiversity and climate action
- Act as a resource and point of contact to help existing module organisers implement relevant case-studies and sections into existing teaching.

- Making sure relevant modules for a Universal Sustainability Curriculum offered from their school are open for all students to attend.
- Twice a year all ESOs meet in a dedicated forum with Planetary Citizenship Lectures to keep each other updated and get inspired
- ESOs can step into the gap left by the discontinued green impact teams (for relevant Schools)
- ESOs must be integrated into the workload model and funded like any other academic administrative post across the university.
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- We also proposing that each School should appoint 2 student ESOs. These would provide an important student perspective on sustainability issues. These could form an internal student network, co-ordinated by the SU Environment Officer. Having student ESOs would act as an important communication channel between student community and staff ESOs.

We are aware that the structure of the sustainability governance at the UEA is currently being refreshed. As part of these changes we would strongly propose the creation of a Sustainability and Climate Education Implementation Committee that oversees the development and embedding of sustainability and climate education across the university. This would provide oversight of plans to develop sustainability education as well as play a key coordinating role. The PCLs and ESOs should be members of this committee.

Broadening

3 Planetary Citizenship curriculum

We suggest that, where possible, sustainability and climate-focused modules should be opened up to more students, subject to timetables, resources and module organiser approval. For example, modules like 'Collective Action for Thriving Planetary Futures' or 'Climate Change: Science and Policy' could be open to all students across UEA.

- Following the two-week planetary citizenship course students have the option to select modules that focus on sustainability from multiple schools as part of their optional modules choices (e.g. a DEV student can take an NBS module on 'Business Sustainability')
- Students who take sustainability modules beyond what is required for their degree could be offered a certificate on 'Climate Change and Society' at the end of the degree if enough relevant modules and credits were completed by students.
- The certificate can even be officially recognized, similar to language modules.

4 New module development

It should become a matter of education policy that School must develop new sustainability and climate modules where ESOs (and others) find notable gaps e.g. Sustainability Marketing, Climate Communication, Sustainability In Our Daily Life.

We envisage that once the PCLs are in place and the ESOs are established, they will collaboratively revisit the curriculum and look for innovative and unique pedagogy in climate education across the university.

Timeline

SUMMER 24

Appoint ESOs in Schools.

AUTUMN 24

- Appoint Student ESOs for AY 24/25
- Sustainability Education Implementation Team launched
- Planetary Citizenship proposals discussed with Schools (led by ESOs)
- PCLs posts advertised
- ESOs discuss sustainability curriculum with colleagues

WINTER 25

PCLs start in post.

SPRING 25

Plans for Planetary Citizenship in AY 25/26 finalised.

AUTUMN 25

First year of Planetary citizenship launched across UEA

Sustainability curriculum publicised to all students.

The UEA Biodiversity and Climate Action Network (UEA BCAN) is a community of staff and students who aspire to make the UEA a global leader in its sustainability practice as well as its research.

A key purpose of BCAN is to bring staff and students together to make a positive change to the university and wider community. The climate and biodiversity crises are increasingly urgent and we believe that all universities have a responsibility to demonstrate leadership to wider society.

Since formation in autumn 2022 we have grown to a network of over 200 members. We set out our vision for UEA in a letter to the executive team, delivered in a spectacular march across campus in February 2023.

Since then, our efforts have been focused on two significant projects: the fossil-free careers campaign and the curriculum reform project. We invite you to join our mailing list, participate in our events and actions, and show your support by signing our petitions on our link tree. Together, let's create a sustainable future for the UEA and beyond. Join us in making a difference today.

UEA was previously ranked 57 in the 2022/23 People and Planet's University League, before slipping down to rank 95 in 2023/24.

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It's time we catch up!

BCAN