

Emissions Impossible: how to get your college to switch to 100% renewable electricity

A resource for further education students' unions planning to campaign against links with the fossil fuel industry on their campus

The fossil fuel industry extracts and exploits fossil fuels, like coal and oil, which when burned release a huge amount of carbon into the atmosphere. These carbon emissions are causing our Earth to increase in temperature at an alarming rate. If we continue on our current path, we are going to lock in more than the 1.5-2 degrees centigrade of warming that the international community have identified as a 'red line'. If we cross this red line, failing to limit our emissions sufficiently, then we are headed towards catastrophic climate change, which include rising sea levels, loss of biodiversity, and mass migration – as parts of the world become uninhabitable.

[Indigenous](#) peoples have been demanding that fossil fuels are kept in the ground for decades. From the ongoing fight of Alberta Cree's [First Nations](#) against the destructive Canadian [tar sands](#) industry, to the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's organising against the Dakota Access Pipeline, we can learn much from the diverse range of tactics that have been used as part of these campaigns – including legal challenges and non-violent direct action. By sharing the stories and amplifying the voices of communities on the [frontlines](#) of fossil fuel extraction we can act in meaningful solidarity with those most impacted by this destructive industry, whilst simultaneously changing our campuses for the better.

Over 80% of fossil fuels need to be left in the ground in order to avoid the worst of climate change. This is why the global [divestment](#) movement seeks to get institutions and organisations to move their money out of fossil fuel companies. Students' unions can play a vital role in advancing this agenda by removing the '[social license](#)' of fossil fuel companies, through presenting them as ethically unacceptable companies for universities and colleges to have links with.

Alongside pushing for the movement of money into positive, socially responsible sectors, such as community energy, the Emissions Impossible campaign seeks to challenge fossil fuel usage in the day to day running of our colleges & universities by getting electricity supplied by 100% renewable sources. As student officers, you can engage with senior managers and governors to make this change. And this resource is all about how those of you in further education (FE) can get involved with this incredible movement!

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Emissions Impossible!

Following [policy](#) passed at National Conference in both 2015 and 2016, NUS launched the Emissions Impossible campaign. Through this campaign we are collaborating with [People and Planet](#), who have been leading calls for colleges and universities to go [Fossil Free](#) through their student activist network since 2013.

Prior to the launch, NUS conducted research into the links between fossil fuel companies and our colleges and universities. The results of this research were published in two reports. The first outlined the [results](#) of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests - the Freedom of Information Act provides us with the right to approach any public sector organisation, like your college, and request certain information they hold, such as who supplies their electricity. The second report looked at [attitudes](#) to divestment, collecting views from students, student officers and staff in further and higher education. Below are some headline figures from this research.

5% of FE colleges reported having governors currently or previously employed by the fossil fuel industry

6% of FE institutions have received a total of **£812,000 from the energy industry, including** monetary gifts, sponsorships and scholarships and bursaries

86% of students, student officers and staff were concerned about climate change

72% say we can't wait a few more years before we tackle climate change

Drawing on this research, our **Emissions Impossible** campaign has three asks:

1. **[£100million to be divest–invested from extractor/producer fossil fuel companies into positive, socially responsible options;](#)**
2. **Commitment from universities and colleges, regardless of current investments, that [new investments be fossil-free;](#)**
3. **Pledge by universities and colleges to commit to be powered by [100% renewable electricity](#) (bought or generated).**

Why join up with the global fossil fuel divestment campaign?

The global fossil fuel divestment campaign is focused on sectors as diverse as universities and religious institutions to local authorities and banks. It seeks to challenge the ability of fossil fuel companies to present themselves as socially acceptable entities for our colleges and universities to have links with. Fossil fuel company business models focus on maximum profit for their shareholders, at the detriment of the rights of indigenous peoples within the areas they operate, as well as wider climate justice issues which result from both the extraction processes and the long-term use of these fuels.

For example, [Shell's abhorrent business practises](#) have led to the destruction of lives, land and livelihoods in the Niger Delta. This has been through [dispossessing the people](#) of the wealth from the natural resources extracted from the region, spilling an excess of 55,809,000 litres of oil into the Niger Delta since 2007 – a figure Amnesty International calls a "[massive underestimate](#)" thus contaminating water people rely on for both drinking and fishing, and also more than likely collaborating in the execution of nine leaders of the Ogoni tribe of southern Nigeria, which included writer Ken Saro-Wiwa – the [Ogoni 9](#).

But, throughout history indigenous resistance to these multinationals has been powerful and relentless. For example, Shell paid out [\\$15.5 million](#) to clear their name in a legal case lasting 13 years initiated by family members of the Ogoni 9. Through campaigning on your college campuses, you can amplify these struggles on your campuses and ensure that your college cuts ties with companies complicit in these kinds of abuses.

Over a third of UK universities have now committed to divest from these companies, and FE colleges can play a significant role in developing these successes. Fossil fuel extractor companies, such as Royal Dutch Shell and BP, are those that take fuels such as coal and oil from the ground. But the fossil fuel industry is wider than those involved in the extraction and production of these resources, as these companies are upheld by a number of other sectors. These include those who provide technology and infrastructure for resource extraction, such as the building of oil rigs, and those who buy these fuels to burn them for the creation of electricity for consumers, such as E.ON and EDF. It is the latter that our third campaign ask is concerned with, and it is a way in which FE students' unions can get involved with the Emission Impossible campaign:

"Pledge by universities and colleges to commit to be powered by 100% renewable electricity (bought or generated)."

If we could mobilise on this across all FE colleges in the UK, the push from students to switch from fossil fuel electricity to renewables would be massive. In this way, your FE College could play a fundamental role in the UK education system's transition towards going fully fossil free and cutting all links with this morally bankrupt industry. This would strengthen not only the divestment movement, but also the profile of your college in leading on social justice issues.

How to get involved

FE colleges don't have fossil fuel company investments like universities, but you can get involved by setting up a campaign to get your college to shift from being powered by companies that burn fossil fuels for electricity to being powered by those who use renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind. You could even take it a step further and push for renewable energy sources on your own campuses, such as solar panels or a wind turbine! If your College already uses 100% renewable electricity (YAY! And [please let us know!](#)) you could link up with local campaigns that are focused on getting your local council to move pension schemes away from fossil fuel company investments. As this resource isn't focused on this particular aspect please feel free to [get in touch](#) for further information or find further details of those in your local area on [350.org's website](#). However, if your college isn't yet 100% renewable it's time to get campaigning!

Planning your campaign!

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This section seeks to assist you with the practicalities of planning your campaign. These are the main areas that need to be considered in the process:

Aim(s): What are you trying to achieve?

Objectives: What smaller steps are needed to help you achieve your aim(s)?

Research: What do you need to know to shape the above?

Target: Who do you need to influence? Who has the decision-making power?

Actors: Who do you need to get on your side?

Tactics: How will you win them over? What actions will you take?

Build it: How will you raise awareness about your campaign and get people on side?

Aims and Objectives

An **aim** is the desired outcome of your campaign. What are you hoping to achieve?

An **objective** is how you will know when you had achieved your aim. What would success look like?

It is important to spend time discussing and focussing the aim of your campaign so that you can talk about it with students, college staff, managers and governors in a clear and understandable way. You need to get them to understand why they should move to renewable electricity suppliers.

Objectives are great to consider as part of this because your campaign aim won't be met overnight. Objectives sustain interest and enthusiasm, as well as allowing you to be sure that your aim has been met. Here are two examples of how this might look:

1. **Aim:** 'We aim to get the college to divest from fossil fuel electricity and to switch to buying 100% renewable.'

Objectives:

- The College to make a public commitment to divest from fossil fuel electricity and switch to 100% renewable electricity;
- The College to protect this in policy to ensure it is future proofed;
- The College to express a formal commitment to this aim.

2. **Aim:** 'We aim to get the college to divest from fossil fuel electricity and switch to 100% renewable electricity, bought *and* generated.'

Objectives:

- The College to make a public commitment to divest from fossil fuel power and switch to 100% renewable electricity;

- The College to explore generating a proportion of their electricity usage through on-campus renewables, such as wind turbines;
- The College to make a formal commitment to this aim and reflect this in their policy and strategy.

Don't be afraid to demand what seems to be the 'impossible'. Be idealistic and from there you have much more space within which to negotiate!

Research

To inform your campaign, we have data about your college's wider links to the fossil fuel industry through research funding etc., but not on the type of electricity your college is using. To find this out we recommend you approach the staff member who would have these details, such as the estates manager. If this isn't possible [get in touch](#) with us and we can send a Freedom of Information request on your behalf or support you to submit one. A useful website for requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act is called 'whatdotheyknow' and can be accessed [here](#).

It is worth noting that FE students' unions and the staff who support you/them, as well as student governors, will likely have access to this information by virtue of your/their position so it's worth asking someone who might know the information first.

What do you need to know to inform your campaign?

- Who is the college's electricity supplier?
- Does your college use renewable electricity? If so, what percentage of overall electricity consumption does this represent?
- Who is responsible for electricity [procurement](#) at your college?
- Does your college have an environmental policy? If so, are there any sections that support your campaign, such as carbon emission reduction?
- Are there any formal processes (outlined in policies, such as the above) by which students and staff can hold the college to account about their energy procurement strategies?

Although this resource is focused on 'ask 3' of the campaign you could also consider exploring starting a divestment campaign focused on other links with the fossil fuel industry. These could include:

- Does your college have any research links with the fossil fuel industry?
- Are there any other types of income, such as scholarships and bursaries that your college receives from the industry?
- Are any of your colleges governors linked to the fossil fuel industry? If so, there could be concerns about conflicts of interest in these discussions.

We hold the above information on colleges from our research so please don't hesitate to [get in touch](#) if you are interested in pursuing a campaign based on the above.

Targets and actors: who do you need to influence?

As part of a campaign to get your college to switch to 100% renewable electricity you need to consider who has the decision-making power to meet your demands. How do you influence them? Who might they listen to if not you? Who else can help you out? Think staff members, trade unions, members of your local community... What committees have

the discussions that feed into the decision? Is there student representation on those committees?

Each college has a governing board that guides the direction of the college. On this board there will be at least one student governor – this could be you in your position as an elected officer or someone selected, or even elected, from the student body. It is important you make use of this position to get a discussion and, hopefully supportive, decision from the overall College Board on electricity procurement.

To get you thinking about all the spheres of influence that exist within your college and how you can utilise them to advance your campaign here’s how a power map you could create might look:



Tactics and building it: creative campaigning ideas

To spread the word about what you are campaigning for, you need to be creative and get your fellow students involved. You might set up a petition, have discussions with college managers and/or link up with local authority campaigns and other colleges working on similar issues. It will also be useful to undertake some creative actions to raise support and awareness about your concerns.

Creative actions seek to promote your campaign to the wider student body at your college. We have included some examples of how campaigners in HE have achieved this below. These are easily translated to the FE context and if you would like some support on planning an action don’t hesitate to [get in touch!](#)



Students at the University of Manchester make clear which fossils are acceptable and which aren't. More information [here](#).



Fossil Free Newcastle highlight the institutions "'ostrich-like response' to climate change". More information [here](#).



EDUCATE! Have a teach-in or debate to open up the dialogue across campus. More information [here](#).

More creative action ideas can be found in [People and Planet's Action Guide for Student Groups](#).

It's all about diversity of tactics!

Creative actions are great for raising awareness and recruiting new members to your campaign, but they won't work in isolation. Alongside them you need to build your campaign for 100% renewable electricity through other tactics:

- Make the link between your campaign and the college's strategy to advance environmental sustainability through exploring what policies and governance documents exist
- Organise a meeting with the Principal and/or Estates Manager at your college – they might be sympathetic and able to assist you with advancing your campaign. Discussions about moving to 100% renewable electricity might already be happening
- Create a policy to establish the campaign as a Union priority
- Creating a [petition](#), for example based on the one made by [Sussex](#) (note their clear list of demands)
- Creating a staff open letter, just like [Sheffield](#) did – link up with Trade Unions who can be a valuable ally in getting staff on side
- Hold an open meeting to include interested members of the local community, here's how [Oxford](#) went about this
- Write an open letter to your Principal and push this through student media channels – see here for [Bristol's](#)
- Hold film screenings – for example, showing [Tarmageddon](#) or [The Age of Stupid](#) to educate the College population about *why* using renewable electricity is so important
- Host a fossil fuels debate, with a panel like [Nottingham's](#)
- Run a social media campaign that includes a platform for updates to supporters. See Aberdeen's [here](#)

Commit to your plan and create a timeline

Now you've discussed the details, commit to your plan and create a timeline of when (not if!) you will have achieved them by.

It is important as your campaign progresses to take the time to monitor and evaluate where your campaign is at, in order to reflect on what has worked and what hasn't, to measure your progress against your timeline and based on this decide whether you need to change or diversify your tactics.

Questions for monitoring and evaluating the campaign could include:

- ❖ How close are you to achieving your objectives, and your overall aim?
- ❖ Have you done everything you had on your timeline that you wished to have achieved by this point? If not, why not? Are there capacity issues that need to be factored in? You might need to edit your timeline to reflect this.
- ❖ Have you increased your social media reach since you started? Can this be correlated with the actions that you have done?
- ❖ Has the size of your organising group increased? How can you recruit more members if not?
- ❖ Are you happy with the number of signatories that you have on your petition at this point?
- ❖ Have you noticed any particular groups of people that have been useful for your campaign? How can you build your relationship with them in order to push the campaign further? And likewise, are there any students and/or staff you need to work harder to engage with? The Engineering and Geology departments, for example.

Questions to help ensure you've covered everything in your campaign strategy...

1. Is your aim achievable?
2. Do your objectives lead to your desired outcome [aim]?
3. Have you identified your targets and your allies?
4. How will you enhance support?
5. What tactics will you use?
6. Is your timeline realistic?
7. How might you escalate if the college refuses to engage?
8. How can the NUS best support you?
9. Does your campaign intersect with other campaigns going on? How might you work with them? For example, local fossil fuel divestment campaigns

Further resources

[Divest-Invest report: Attitudes](#); [Divest-Invest report: Investments](#); [Emissions Impossible: Student Union Motion Template](#); [Emissions Impossible: Template Paper for University Committees](#); [Don't Dither, Divest!](#); [Go Green Week Guide](#); [People and Planet Action Guide](#); [Positive Investment Briefing](#)

NUS run workshops to help students plan their Emissions Impossible campaign so don't hesitate to [get in contact](#) if you would like one of these at your college!

GOOD LUCK AND KEEP IN TOUCH!

Glossary

Divestment: moving money out of morally ambiguous stocks and shares.

Electricity procurement: the process your College goes through to find and choose their electricity supplier. This is often outsourced to an external agency.

First Nations: the self-defined identity used by a group of indigenous folk fighting the tar sands industry in Canada.

Fossil fuels: a natural fuel formed over millions of years from the remains of prehistoric living organisms, such as dinosaurs. When burned these fuels release carbon into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming and climatic changes.

Fossil fuel extractor companies: such as Royal Dutch Shell and BP whose business models rely on extracting fossil fuels, like coal and oil, from the ground and exploiting them for maximum profit for their shareholders.

Frontlines: communities that are living where the expansion of the fossil fuel regime is taking place – such as Alberta’s Cree First Nations who continue to fight against the expansion of the Canadian tar sands industry.

Indigenous: due to the diversity and colonial history that has faced, and continues to face, communities who

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identify as indigenous there is no ‘official’ definition for this term - it is based on self-definition. The [United Nations](#) bases this on the following: self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member; historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic or political systems; distinct language, culture and beliefs; form non-dominant groups of society, and resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

Reinvestment: moving money from morally ambiguous areas to those that positively contribute to the progression of society.

Renewable sources: electricity generated by naturally occurring earth processes, such as solar and wind.

Social license: ongoing approval at the societal level for a company to continue to operate as they currently do. In essence, the way they currently conduct themselves has broad social acceptance.

Tar Sands: an unconventional fossil fuel, requiring an energy-intensive process to turn the combination of clay, water and bitumen into oil.