1. Students Organising for Sustainability

SOS-UK is an educational charity created by students and staff at NUS in response to the climate emergency and ecological crisis. Through our work we aim to:

- Get more students leading on, and learning for, sustainability;
- Repurpose the education system around the climate emergency and ecological crisis;
- Make sustainability more inclusive, so it is for everyone.

We believe that when students lead on sustainability, they learn about it, picking up the vital knowledge, skills, values and competencies they will need to help transform society into a more just and sustainable place. We are the charity behind Teach the Future, Mock COP and The RACE Report. You can read more about our work at www.sos-uk.org.

2. The problem

University is where most high-level decision makers are educated, but much of what is taught in key subjects does not support or align with the actions needed to tackle the climate emergency and ecological crisis. As David Orr, the US academic activist, says, “...the destruction of the planet is not the work of ignorant people. Rather it is largely the results of work by people with BAs, BScs, LLBs, MBAs, and PhDs...Education can equip people to be more effective vandals of the earth.”

Over the last few years we have seen economics students making this point, with the Post-Crash Economics Society at The University of Manchester evolving into the global Rethinking Economics campaign, which is calling for more pluralist, environmental and feminist economics being taught in economics degrees. Although they have made some localised progress, they say that most economics degrees still fail to prepare students to lead on responses needed to address the climate emergency and ecological crisis. We are not aware of any similar campaigns calling for curriculum reform in other pivotal Higher Education subjects like law, politics, engineering and teacher education.

Our own research suggests university courses of all types are not currently meeting student expectations for learning for sustainability as desire to learn about the subject increases as they progress through their degrees. For example, 60% of first year university students say they want to learn more about sustainable development, compared to 66% of those in their third year of study. A new report, in May 2022, suggested that there is a disconnect between what students want on sustainability and what institutions are delivering.

Furthermore, we know that some key subjects are influenced by large corporates that are working against the advice of the world’s leading climate scientists to stay with the 1.5°C warming limit. One of our previous Mock COP student staff, Josh Tregale, is currently studying Engineering at Imperial College. In the first week of his course he was given a course t-shirt which was sponsored by BP. He also reports that Shell’s branding is on his exam data sheet. This is an example of how universities are allowing fossil fuel and polluting companies to influence students in their pursuit of securing future talent.
3. Our solution: 1.5 degrees

We will analyse the course guides for the top 30 universities around the world that teach economics, law, politics, engineering, and education and training. We will rank them in order of how progressive they are in how they are preparing their students to tackle the climate emergency and ecological crisis through their future career. This will create an alternative league table that will help both influence where students choose to study and incentivise curriculum reform by the world’s leading universities, which should consequentially influence other universities across the world.

This work will be led by our global team of six Mock COP student staff, and overseen by Meg Baker, our Director of Education. Initially we will use a combination of existing league tables to identify which are our target universities. We will then access their course guides for the relevant subjects, which are typically all in the public domain, and assess whether what they are teaching is compatible with keeping the global temperature increase below 1.5°C, as per the Paris Agreement.

Prior to the assessment, we will develop a robust and transparent assessment methodology, shaped by experts that we recruit to sit on the 1.5 degrees advisory board. We plan that our advisory board will comprise of leading progressive academics and educators, representatives of leading charities that work on these issues, representatives from the professional bodies that accredit the curricula, and representatives of progressive employers, covering all five of our target disciplines. As well as looking at course content, we will look at which corporate interests are involved in sponsoring and shaping each course and factor that into the scoring system. We also plan to reach out to recent alumni from each course, as far as is practicably possible, to informally validate our findings.

Once we have ranked the top 30 institutions for each of the five disciplines, and our advisory board has sense-checked our findings, we will publish the rankings in a league table, which will be housed on a brand-new website that we will build for this project. The research will be done between June and October 2022 so we can launch the findings during COP27 in November 2022 alongside the Education Ministers Summit that we are planning for the second year running. We will work with a PR agency to amplify our findings globally and then keep circulating our findings through social media throughout November and December 2022 and January 2023, which is the time of year that many students decide where they want to study for the following academic year. Our intention is that 1.5 degrees becomes an annual ranking that received global attention. We plan to extend it to other key

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1 The Times Higher World University Rankings, the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings and The Academic Ranking of World Universities.
2 Using economics as an example, we would ask key individuals like Kate Raworth or Tim Jackson; key charities like Rethinking Economics or New Economics Foundation; a professional body like the Association of Certified Chartered Economists.
subjects from year two. These might include subjects like business, design and architecture.

1.5 degrees will be led by SOS-UK via Mock COP and will be supported and amplified by SOS-International.

4. Outputs
   - Transparent and robust methodology.
   - High-profile branding and attractive, functional website, with ranking tables.
   - Press release on year one rankings.
   - Launch event at COP27.
   - Coverage of 1.5 degrees in the press in 10 or more countries in year one.

5. Outcomes
   - Students around the world view our league table and are influenced on where to study.
   - Teaching staff in pivotal subjects' reform what they teach so aspects are centred on tackling the climate emergency and ecological crisis.
   - Graduates are better equipped to be part of the solution to the climate emergency and ecological crisis, rather than part of the problem.
   - Disrupt the talent pipeline for fossil fuel companies and other big polluters.

6. Year one budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand and identity creation, including social media assets</td>
<td>£2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website creation and hosting</td>
<td>£1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR work (including irrecoverable VAT)</td>
<td>£15,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student staff (totalling 1.6 FTE for six months)</td>
<td>£18,163</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overheads, including line management</td>
<td>£4,321</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>£41,484</strong></td>
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We have approached The JJ Charitable Trust for a contribution towards these costs. We intend to also approach The Pickwell Foundation and Partners for a New Economy. Our fall-back plan is to fund any shortfall for the project from our reserves and then try to recover the costs from donations from progressive corporates, and we have warm leads in WSP, Pearson’s and Norton Rose Fulbright LLP.

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