

Students as Agents for Change

Responsible Futures - student symposium

April, 2025



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM



Your facilitators



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Aims and objectives



Our aim for this session:

- Understand students as change makers in the context of climate justice and sustainability

Our objectives for this session:

- Develop a shared understanding of key concepts including sustainability and climate justice
- Empowering students as leaders
- Becoming good peer supporters

Themes in this session:

- 1) **Growth**  2) **Peer Learning** 

Understanding your growth: How you can contribute to sustainability in your institution or more widely



2: Seeds planted - At the start of your journey

4: Tree - Fully fledged understanding



1: Sowing the seeds - new to this idea



3: Sapling - Solid grasp

What do these words mean to you?

Sustainability

Climate justice

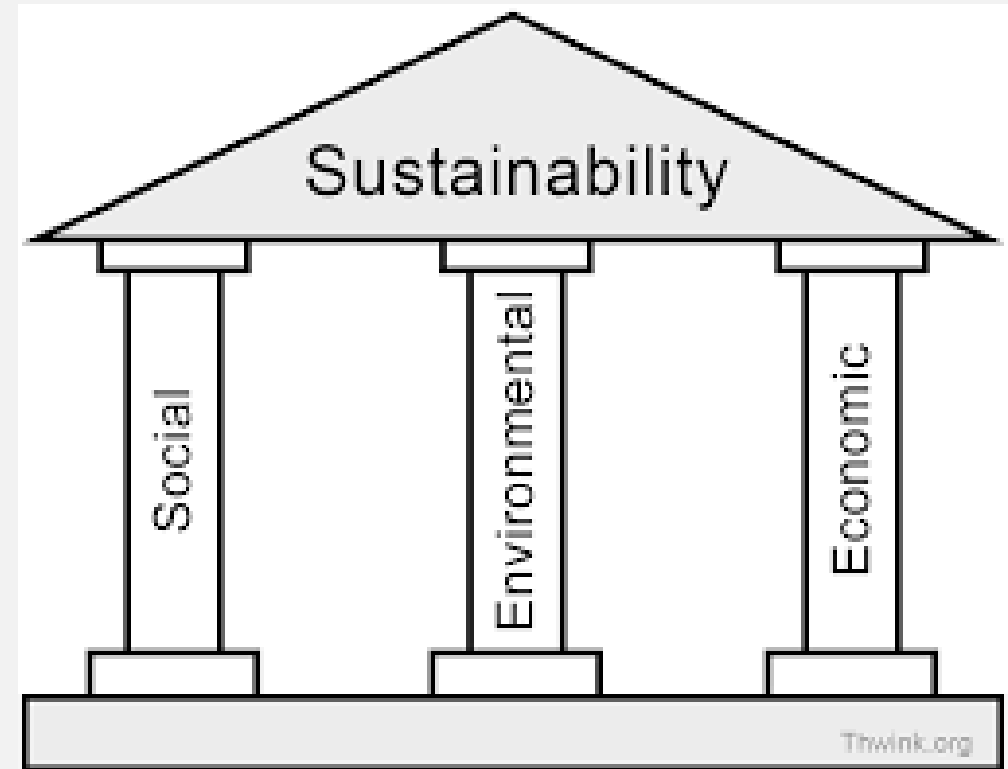
Change agent

Sustainability and climate justice

What is sustainability?

*“A sustainable world is one where people can escape poverty and enjoy decent work **without harming the earth’s essential ecosystems and resources**; where people can stay **healthy** and get the **food and water** they need; where everyone can access **clean energy** that doesn’t contribute to climate change; where women and girls are afforded **equal rights and equal opportunities**.”*

United Nations (UN) Secretary-General
Ban-Ki Moon



The UN Sustainable Development Goals



What is this goal referring to?



What is this goal referring to?



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What is this goal referring to?

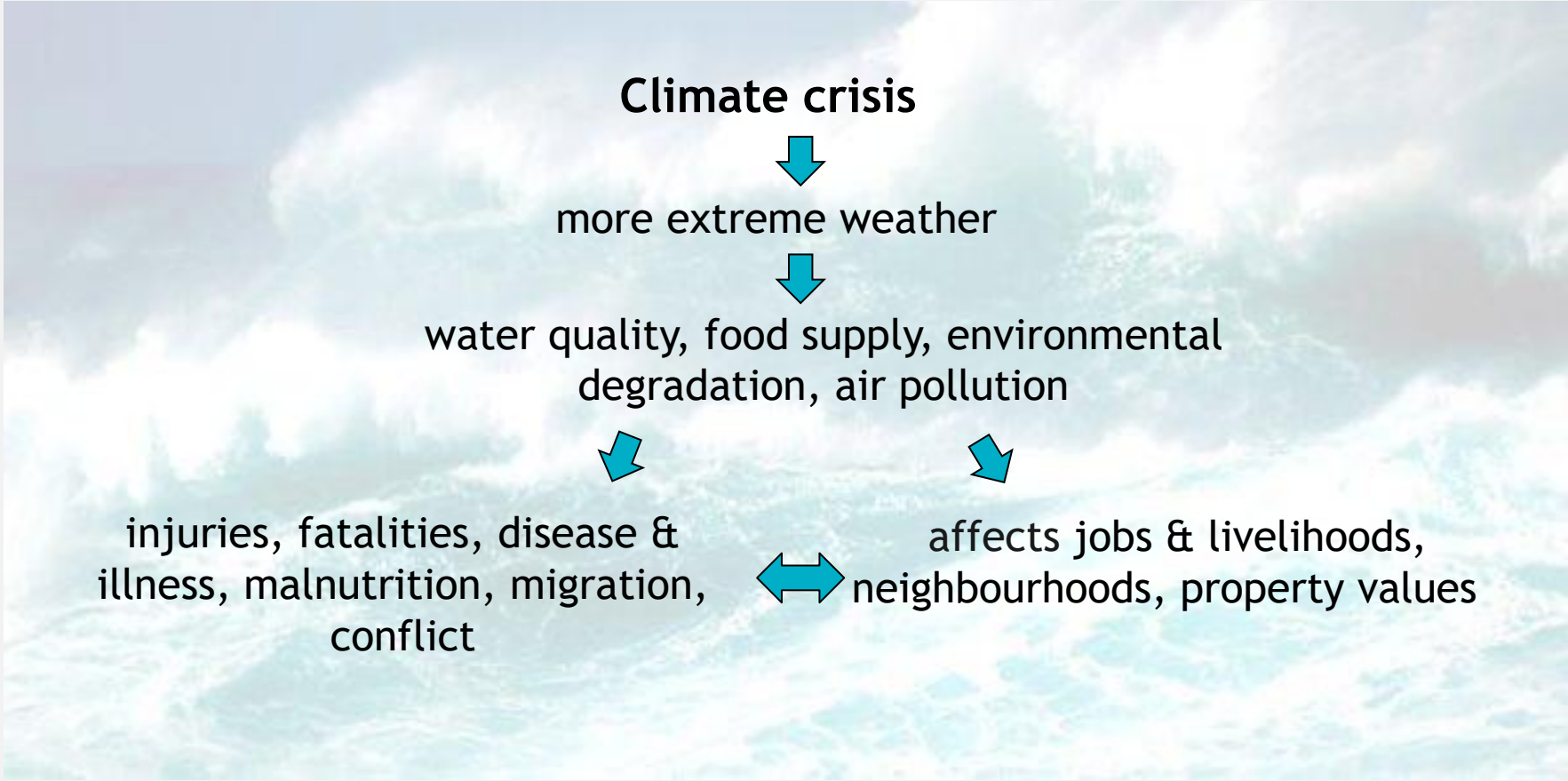


The UN Sustainable Development Goals

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The climate crisis



Climate justice

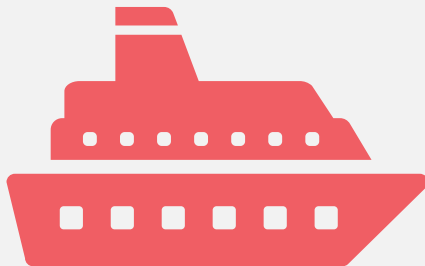


“Climate justice is the moral, social and political side of the climate crisis, understanding that certain communities and minorities will face different and more damaging consequences of climate change sooner and harsher than others.”

Leah Duffy, Teach the Future campaigner

Same storm, different boats

We are all in the same storm ('the climate crisis'), but our varying privileges mean we are facing the storm in different boats, with some groups able to avoid the worst effects.



Climate justice - intersectionality

80%

of people displaced
by climate change
are women

- *United Nations*



(family photo of Ella Abdo Kissi-Debrah)

Why should students be change agents for sustainability?

Why do we need students as change agents?

- 222 million students enrolled in tertiary education globally - **systems change**
- Student-led campaigns have made positive contributions to sustainability and climate justice across the world



Source: [Fridaysforfuture.ca](https://fridaysforfuture.ca)



Source: peopleandplanet.org



Source: New York Time

Student demand for sustainability

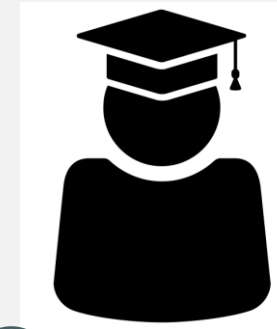
We know from a decade of research that the majority of students want more sustainability education:



63% say they agree their place of study should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development



78% would like to see sustainable development actively incorporated and promoted through all courses



81% say sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about

Source: SOS-UK Skills Survey 2023-2024. Sample size = 11,300+ students

Student skills development

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Skills for sustainable development...

Looking at global problems from the perspective of people from around the world

Considering ethical issues linked to your subject

The causes of inequality in the world

Understanding how to create change

Understanding how human activity is affecting nature

Challenging the way we do things now (like business, politics, education)

Solving problems by thinking about whole systems - including different connections and interactions

Communicating complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people

Using resources efficiently to limit the impact on the environment and other people

Looking at a problem using information from different subjects or disciplines

Planning for the long term, as well as the short term

Valuing student knowledge and experience

- Ensuring fit for purpose responses to the climate crisis
 - Students know the world they are graduating into
 - Students know their culture and community
- Rethinking what is deemed as “valuable” knowledge
 - Lived experience
 - Cultural experiences



How can students be change agents for sustainability?

Activity: Head, heart, and hands for leadership

Holistic approach to learning, considering:

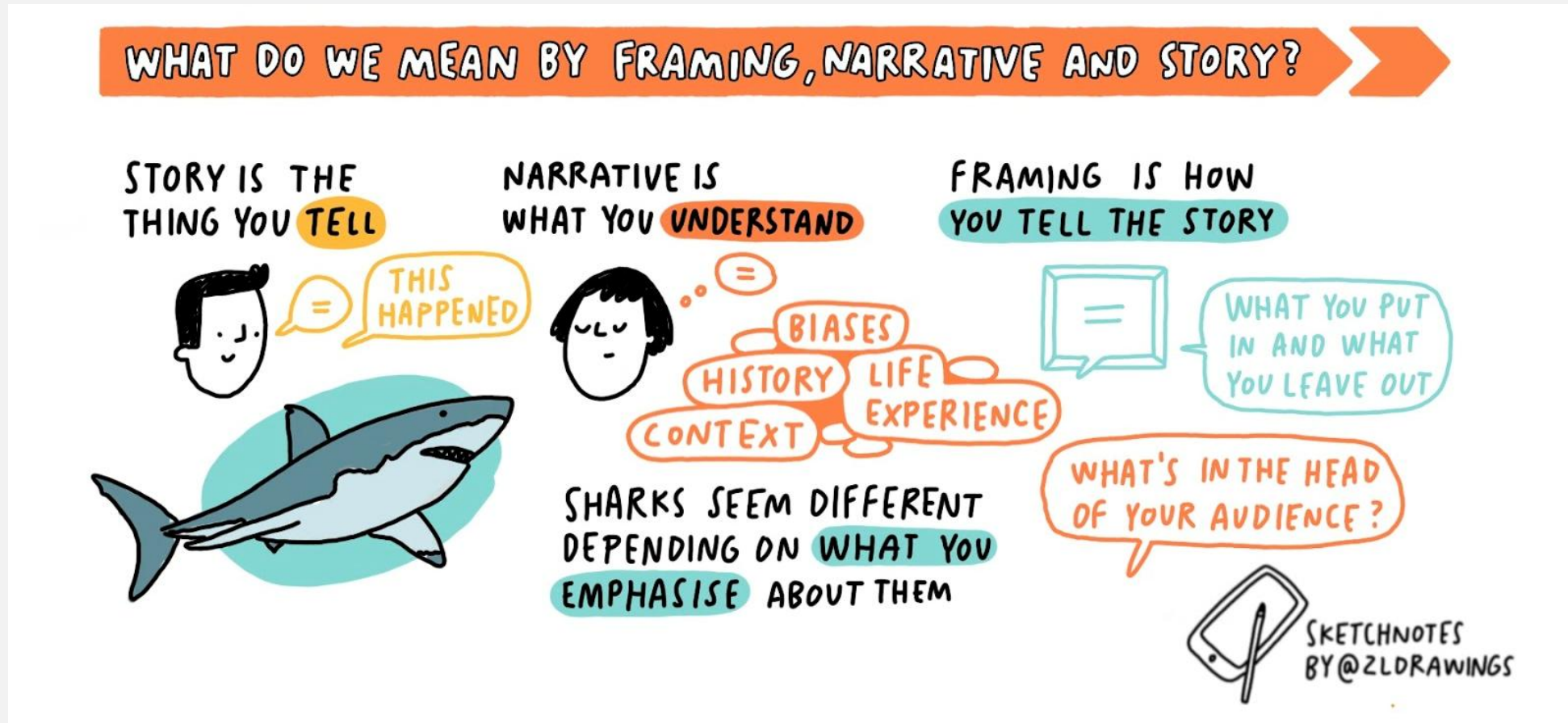
Head (knowledge, thinking)

Heart (social and emotional learning e.g., values and beliefs)

Hands (practical skills, behaviours)



The importance of communication in sustainability



“Leadership is rooted not in power and authority, but in service and wisdom”

Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Wall Kimmerer

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Responsible Futures partners students with their institution to embed sustainability and climate justice in all learning.

How?

- Framework supporting staff and students to take action for sustainability in learning
- Student-led audit assessing the institutions work on sustainability, determining accreditation
- Peer learning



How can students take sustainability and climate action in their institution?

1. Develop transparent dialogue with your university or college- ask questions, check out league tables, get involved in consultations
2. Join sustainability societies - or embed sustainability and climate justice frameworks in societies in which you are currently involved
3. Encourage educators to embed sustainability in modules/courses to support you and your peers to develop sustainability skills
4. Encourage your teachers to embed sustainability/the UN SDGs in their courses (e.g., SDG Teach In)
5. Find extra-curricular opportunities to progress sustainability
6. Get involved in Responsible Futures

Ideas for Student Leadership Groups

| Activity | Example of outcomes |
|---|--|
| Advocacy and Policy Initiatives | E.g. committing to fairtrade/ reviewing supply chains to commit to ethical procurement within policies - considerate of the social and environmental impacts of our supply chains. |
| Community Engagement | E.g. Create inclusive spaces with sustainability and environment related initiatives which bring in the wider community (within and or beyond campus). E.g. big campus cook up using rescued food working with a student society and or local community group who bring their culture's recipes. |
| Educational Initiatives | E.g. Host workshops on climate justice to raise awareness among student union members. Cover topics such as the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities and the intersectionality of environmental and social justice issues. |
| Action-oriented Programs/Workshops for daily changes | E.g. Conduct a workshop on adopting a zero-waste lifestyle. Provide practical tips on reducing single-use plastics etc. E.g. Launch a campaign promoting sustainable transportation options such as biking, walking, carpooling, or using public transportation. |
| Awareness Building through social media, webinars and workshops | E.g. a weekly series providing practical eco-tips on social media. Cover a range of topics, from energy conservation to sustainable fashion, and invite followers to share their own tips and experiences. E.g. Feature local businesses, initiatives, or community leaders working towards climate justice. Encourage followers to support and engage with these entities, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility. This could also further into a workshop collation with local businesses. |
| Collaborating liberation groups such as BPOC and LGBTQIA+ societies to support them better. | E.g. BHM can profile progress Black environmentalists/ Collab fashion show with BPOC/ LGBTQIA+/Environment soc using upcycled clothing |

Personal reflection - fill in the gaps

*Sustainability is relevant to me because **(your reasons)** and as a [your role eg student] I can **(your actions)** to lead on sustainability.*

Share your reflection in the chat box - how can you use your role to drive change within your institutions?

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Thank you!

Tomorrow

| Time | Session | Facilitator | Theme |
|------------------------|---|-------------|--------------------------------|
| 14:30 to 16:30 UK time | <p>Student Sustainability Showcase - presentations *</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to a range of presentations from students across the world about how they're leading on transformative sustainability in colleges and universities.• Featuring students from Responsible Futures institutions. | SOS and UWE | Good practice Peer Learning |

Thursday

| Time | Session | Facilitator | Theme |
|---------------------------|--|-------------|--------------------------------|
| 12:00 to 13:30 UK time | Green skills and green jobs workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Embedding sustainability values into any career• Advice for finding sustainable careers• Green skills | SOS | Good practice Peer learning |
| 13:30-13:45 UK time | Comfort break | ----- | ----- |
| 13:45-14:15 UK time | Closing Plenary and next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recapping each session and notable conversations or stories through interactive exercises• Closing remarks from UWE• Closing remarks from SOS including practical actions and upcoming events | UWE and SOS | ----- |

