

STUDENTS CALL FOR STRONGER ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE – INCLUDING CAMPUS BANS ON SINGLE-USE PLASTICS, FINES FOR PEERS AND ANNUAL LIMITS ON FLIGHTS

Embargoed until 00.01 on Tuesday 15 June 2021

- *New research shows that students are more concerned about climate change than any other issue in 2021 – including COVID-19*
- *Just 18% are happy with the UK government's approach to the issue, despite pledge to set target to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 into law earlier this year*
- *Students are calling for strong action – a third would now like to see peers fined by universities for failing to live in an environmentally-friendly way on campus*
- *Students also taking bold action in day-to-day life – 88% say they now limit air travel annually for environmental reasons*
- *Concerns are also impacting career choices – a fifth would turn down a job with high salary if company's climate change reputation was poor*

New research by Unite Students, the UK's largest provider of student accommodation, shows that students are more concerned about climate change than any other issue in 2021 – including the challenges of COVID-19.

In a survey of 1,000 undergraduate students, carried out in collaboration with Opinium, the majority (60%) identified climate change and environmental issues as one of the top three most urgent priorities for world leaders to tackle today. This was followed by COVID-19 in second place, which was chosen by 46%.

The same research revealed that just 18% think the UK government is currently doing a good job at tackling climate change. A quarter (25%) think the same of the EU and just 15% think similarly of UK businesses.

In addition, less than a quarter (23%) think that the UK government's carbon emission targets are ambitious enough at present. This comes despite the government's recent announcement that it will set its pledge to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 into law.

Students call for bold action on climate change – from universities, business and Government

Dissatisfied with progress, students are calling for bold action on climate change, from both universities and the Government.

On university campuses, for example, students expressed support for a raft of measures to reduce the student body's impact on the environment:

- 70% think universities should now impose a **total ban on single use plastics** on campus
- 65% agree that universities should **cut ties with any companies** that have a negative impact in terms of climate change
- 63% of students living in student accommodation think it should be **compulsory for their student accommodation provider or landlord** to help them live in an environmentally-friendly way
- 61% want to see **more university courses** with a focus on tackling climate change

- A third (33%) agree that **universities should now fine students** who fail to adhere to guidance or rules around living in an environmentally friendly way
- 14% now think **campuses should be totally meat-free**

Students also support a strong approach from Government, for example:

- 80% agree that the Government should **impose targets** for companies around climate change and **finest** for those which fail to meet them
- Almost a third (31%), meanwhile, think that the Government should **impose limits on the number of flights individuals can book** each year

Students are also taking matters into their own hands – climate change concerns are driving major lifestyle shifts

Students are also making major changes to their day-to-day life, as well as long-term plans, to limit their impact on the environment.

In terms of day-to-day changes, for example:

- 88% of students say that they now **limit the number of flights** they take, for environmental reasons, at least some of the time (59% say they do this always/often)
- 49% and 68% say that they **follow a vegan or vegetarian diet** respectively, for environmental reasons, at least some of the time
- When **choosing which brands** to buy from, further, 76% said it is important that they are working toward tackling climate change
- 50% of students said that they are either **a member of a society, organisation or campaign group** focused on tackling climate change at university, or they are interested in joining one

When it comes to higher education and career path, climate change concerns are also having a significant impact.

The majority of students said that they had either checked or now plan to check the specific climate change policies or reputation of universities (53%) and companies (67%) before applying to work or study there.

Around 1 in 3 students (31%) agreed that they would not apply to a university which has a poor track record on climate change and 39% said that they would not apply for a job at a company which has a poor track record on climate change. Further, a fifth of students (21%) agreed that they would turn down a job offer with a high salary, if the company's reputation around climate change was poor.

Separately, over three quarters of students (76%) say that their feelings around climate change will now influence the career they plan to pursue in some way.

Around 42% said that they are likely to pursue a career that actively tackles climate change (8% very likely, 35% somewhat likely). Of those, 46% said they had an interest in working in sustainability, 38% in scientific research, 22% in conservation, 16% policy/politics, and 7% in full time activism.



James Tiernan, Head of Energy & Environment at Unite Students, said:

"The climate emergency is one of the most pressing matters facing our society and it is encouraging to see students are so engaged on the issue.

"Universities and accommodation providers have a real responsibility to help students live more sustainably, and also to significantly reduce the impacts of their own operations – something we're fully committed to.

"Our new sustainability strategy includes a commitment to achieving net-zero carbon operations and construction by 2030. This will require sustained investment in energy efficiency and renewables, but also the help and support of our employees and student customers. It is therefore very encouraging to see students expressing support for bold measures, and also taking action daily which will have a tangible impact. "

Richard Smith, Chief Executive of Unite Students, said:

"This research brings to life just how committed today's students really are when it comes to tackling the climate change crisis.

"It goes far beyond one-off awareness-raising events – although these are, of course, important. Many students are now shaping their day-to-day life and long-term plans around making a difference, involving significant sacrifices along the way, which is hugely commendable.

"As the UK's largest accommodation provider, we have a clear responsibility to do all we can to facilitate students' efforts to live sustainably and in an environmentally-friendly way. This is precisely what we are working towards with our sustainability commitments."

Jade Monroe, Director at SOS-UK, the NUS' student-led education charity focusing on sustainability, said:

"This research demonstrates the strength of feeling from students around climate change. It is evident on campus how engaged students are - taking personal action, wanting to know more about sustainability in their studies and their expectation for universities and leaders to work towards ambitious targets.

"At SOS-UK we have seen how students and young people ensured sustainability does not fall off the agenda in recent times. They have been embracing new ways of working and adapting to ensure that they can still progress the issues that they care about, showing remarkable commitment to create a better and more just future."

For further information, please contact:

Unite Students

Unite Press Office

Tel: +44 117 450 6300

Powerscourt

Victoria Heslop/ Courtney Sanford

Tel: +44 20 7250 1446

Notes to Editors:

Research conducted by Opinium between 14th and 25th May 2021 among 1000 undergraduate students in the UK.

About Unite Students

Unite Students is the UK's largest owner, manager and developer of purpose-built student accommodation, serving the country's world-leading Higher Education sector. We provide homes to 74,000 students across 173 properties in 25 leading University towns and cities. We currently partner with over 60 Universities across the UK.

Our people are driven by a common purpose: to provide a 'Home for Success' for the students who live with us. Unite Students' accommodation is safe and secure, high quality and affordable. Students live predominantly in ensuite study bedrooms, with rents covering all bills, insurance, 24-hour security and high-speed Wi-Fi. We also hold a five-star British Safety Council audit rating.

Founded in 1991 in Bristol, Unite Group is an award-winning Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), listed on the London Stock Exchange and a member of the FTSE 250 Index.

For more information, visit:

- Unite Student's corporate website www.unite-group.co.uk
- The student site www.unitestudents.com

Unite Students' five sustainability commitments

1. Targeting net-zero carbon operations and construction from 2030

Reduce carbon emissions from new and existing buildings in line with climate science, ahead of the timescale set out in the Paris Climate Agreement to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

2. Creating resilient, resource-efficient assets and operations

Reduce the environmental impact of our new and existing buildings by improving energy and water efficiency, and also help its students to adopt lasting sustainable living habits.

3. Enhancing the health and wellbeing of our employees and students

Driving real improvements in physical and mental health and wellbeing based on an understanding of their needs, through improvements to our service model, physical assets and employee support programmes.

4. Providing opportunities for all

Backed by new diversity targets, including students, employees and in the communities where we work, where all can succeed, whatever their background, gender or ethnicity.

5. Leading the student housing sector

We will work to raise standards across the student housing sector and deliver value to our customers and investors.

