CLIMATE EDUCATION

# INTRODUCTION

King’s has many climate-related modules offered across the university and degree levels. Yet these are still largely concentrated in specific degrees, and opportunities for cross-over between departments remain restricted to a few departments (e.g. Law and Geography). King’s is taking many steps to address our negative climate impacts through the climate action network recommendations. Education, along with research and community engagement, offers an important opportunity for the university to make significant positive contributions to global efforts to address climate change, by helping to shape the next generation of leaders, policymakers, changemakers, and activists.

Students are asking for this, and we should rise to meet this demand, which in turn will also help attract an even more engaged student body. Some data evidencing this demand:

* 97% of King’s students are fairly or very concerned about climate change [survey][[1]](#footnote-2)
* 71% said they have not been taught about climate change at King’s – either in their course, or through extracurricular activities [King’s 100][[2]](#footnote-3)
* 90% believes it is fairly or very important for the Climate Action Strategy to embed education on climate change and climate action into the curriculum at King’s [survey]

This summary report reviews these student demands and then summarises the data on the scope of modules offered on climate change and directly related topics. We then make recommendations and outline an implementation timeline on ways to expand offerings, improve access, and address students' requests. This analysis is a preliminary review of current educational offerings to complement our broader climate action network and net zero goals.

Our primary recommendation is that a larger and more in-depth student-led curriculum audit be conducted not just on climate but related to all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This report is also an important step to creating an interdisciplinary climate research site (and ultimately an institution or climate centre) that unites climate research and teaching across the university.

# OUR VISION FOR STRENGTHENING CLIMATE EDUCATION AT KING’S

King’s graduates will be:

* Climate leaders ready to tackle the world’s greatest climate challenges
* Empowered to embed climate considerations into any career they pursue
* Equipped to tackle cross-disciplinary issues in climate

# WHAT ARE STUDENTS ASKING FOR?

According to the survey we carried out, the most popular initiatives to support climate education are (ranked in order of popularity):

* Build climate change material into the existing content of degree programmes (77%)
* Offer placements or work experience (74%)
* Offer a non-examined course on climate change (72%)
* Extra-curricular activities by King's central services, e.g. panel events, film screenings, sustainability entrepreneurship competitions (72%)
* Offer a specific module on climate change (related to degree programmes) (69%)
* Extra-curricular activities run within the students' union (69%)
* Offer a non-examined general interest course on sustainability (67%)
* Extra-curricular activities run within departments (62%)
* Offer interdisciplinary examined sustainability modules that include climate change (not directly related to degree programmes) (49%)
* Link coursework or dissertations to the issues of climate change and sustainability (44%)
* Offer interdisciplinary examined modules on climate change (not directly related to degree programmes) (39%)

# EDUCATION DATA

Preliminary findings:

* 106 climate modules identified
* Large majority based in the Faculty of SSPP (70%)  
   of which the large majority in the Department of Geography (69%)
* Some interdisciplinary options, but most seem to be within the faculty of SSPP
* Most modules are at Postgraduate level (57%)
* Most modules are optional (76%)
* Most have a weak link to climate change (53%); only 26% have a strong link

Per Faculty:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FACULTY** | **CLIMATE RELATED MODULES** | **PERCENTAGE** |
|  | **Number** | **%** |
| **Social Science & Public Policy**  *of which in Geography* | **74** | **69.8** |
| *51* | *68.9* |
| **Business** | **9** | **8.5** |
| **Natural & Mathematical Sciences** | **7** | **6.6** |
| **Law** | **7** | **6.6** |
| **Arts & Humanities** | **6** | **5.7** |
| **Life Sciences & Medicine** | **2** | **1.9** |
| **Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences** | **0** | **0** |
| **Nursing, Midwifery & Palliative Care** | **0** | **0** |
| **Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience** | **0** | **0** |
| ***Unclassified*** | **1** | **1** |
| **Total** | **106** | **100** |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **LEVEL OF STUDY** | | |
|  | Number | % |
| Postgrad | 60 | 56.6 |
| Undergrad | 43 | 40.6 |
| Other | 1 | 0.9 |
| Unclassified | 2 | 1.9 |
| **Total** | **106** | **100** |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **REQUIRED VS OPTIONAL** | | |
|  | Number | % |
| Required | 23 | 21.7 |
| Optional | 80 | 75.5 |
| Unclassified | 3 | 2.8 |
| **Total** | **106** | **100** |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE** | | |
|  | Number | % |
| Strong | 28 | 26.4 |
| Medium | 18 | 17.0 |
| Weak | 56 | 52.8 |
| Unclassified | 4 | 3.8 |
| **Total** | **106** | **100** |

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1/ Conduct a full SDG curriculum audit to:

* Map modules linked to all SDGs beyond climate-related modules
* Differentiate between modules focused on the SDGs and those that merely address it
* Have clear guidelines on categorising modules to make the findings more reliable

2/ Embed climate considerations into each module:

* This is what students are mostly asking for [see survey data]
* Push beyond the concentration of climate education in Geography
* Clearly tie modules to the SDGs for ease of recognition and relevance
* Show how climate links to every degree / topic

3/ Make it interdisciplinary:

*\*The King’s Strategic Vision 2029 views the university as interdisciplinary by nature, and steps are being taken to further materialise this commitment in our education, including but not limited to climate teaching.*

* By opening up more modules to other departments, the student demand for climate teaching could be answered without needing to develop countless new modules
* An open-source/online Climate Action and Sustainability KEATS module is currently being developed, which will become available to all students and staff and will address all areas of climate action in an interdisciplinary fashion

4/ Develop more required climate modules across degrees:

* Our role in educating our students and preparing them for a future in which climate change plays a central role gives us this responsibility
* Expand their scope importantly also in undergraduate degrees

# NEXT STEPS

1. Carry out a full student-led curriculum audit for sustainable development, supported by SOS-UK
2. Embed the Responsible Futures Programme by SOS-UK and achieve the accreditation to embed sustainability across formal, informal and subliminal curricula
3. Embed SOS-UK's programme on Education for Sustainable Development changemakers, emphasising a co-creation approach
4. Educate the educators: train all academic staff on embedding climate considerations / the SDGs into their teaching
5. Build upon the current work on increasing interdisciplinarity at King’s and expand it to climate teaching

# CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

This report presents only a preliminary collation of our current climate education at King’s. The numbers provided are estimates and are by no means certain. Some modules might have ceased to exist, and new modules might have been created which were not on our radar. Besides, for the purposes of this report, no clear boundary was established of what constitutes a climate module, meaning that the differentiation between modules that address climate change at some point of the teaching and modules fully focused on climate change is blurred. An attempt to start classifying them was made through the strong/medium/weak classification, but this should be further strengthened for the official curriculum audit to obtain more reliable findings. As the survey showed that building climate change material into the existing content of degree programmes was the most popular initiative, this more detailed mapping will be ever more important for effective integration of the SDGs into existing modules.

1. The survey was carried out in May/June 2021. It was sent out to all King’s students and staff and received 146 respondents, among whom 40 students. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The King’s 100 focused on climate action took place in April 2021. This data is based on the pre-work survey from 100 students. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)