

Nominations and Remuneration Committee

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 13 December 2023
Paper Title	Environment and Sustainability Project: Survey Update
Agenda Item	10
Paper Number	PRC2-F
Responsible Officer	Martin Boyle, Executive Director / Sue Roberts PM (Env. And Sus.)
Status	Disclosable
Action	For noting

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1** Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board (GCRB) has continued to support a regional environment and sustainability approach, investing in the creation of opportunities for coordinated region-wide planning, collaboration, professional development, and work with wider partners including Glasgow City Council as part of its developing skills and just transition planning.
- 1.2** This work has predominantly been done in conjunction with the GCRB Project Manager (Environment and Sustainability) and key college staff. This was led by the development of a regional environment and sustainability strategy, previously approved by the GCRB board.
- 1.3** A key strand of that work was the development of a mechanism for surveying staff and students to understand the current position on a number of related matters. The first survey was delivered in 2023, and the initial findings are presented to committee today.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** Committee is invited to **note** and **comment** on the process and findings of the survey, and to endorse sharing with GCRB board.
- 2.2** Committee is invited to **comment** on the suggested recommendations, which will be developed into an operational plan to be co-created with colleagues in the Glasgow colleges.
- 2.3** Committee is invited to **comment** on the value of using this work as a template for a recurring survey, which could be used to measure change over time and to provide additional reporting for the annual outcome and assurance processes.

3. Report

3.1 The attached report provides an overview of the results of the 2023 environment and sustainability survey, conducted across all three Glasgow colleges. It is the largest survey of its type conducted in Scotland's college system, and the final version will be used to inform future activity via a set of recommendations.

3.2 The draft report has been shared with the colleges' learning and teaching leads via the Glasgow Colleges' Group Learning and Teaching Committee, and with finance and HR leads via the Glasgow Colleges' Group Sustainability Committee. A learning and teaching fact finding process for curriculum development is under development with Learning and Teaching group following these meetings.

3.3 It is intended that the draft will be edited following this committee, report and recommendations shared with relevant GCG groups for comment and brought to board for further discussion prior to publication of the results. Thereafter, both recommendations and a plan for future survey process will be developed and agreed.

4. Risk and Compliance Analysis

4.1 There are no additional new risks associated with this report.

5. Financial and Resource Analysis

5.1 There are no additional financial or resources implications. All activity has been fully costed within current budgets.

6. Equalities Implications

6.1 Glasgow's Just Transition and Skills Action Plan both make clear reference to environment and sustainability impact creating inequality and having varying degrees of impact across different communities in Glasgow. It is intended that this work contributes to the wider projects to mitigate against this long-term impact.

7. Learner Implications

7.1 The survey result provides a valuable insight into the views, motivations and understanding of current learners in this area, and is intended to contribute to wider planning which ensures appropriate access to training, information and courses.

Glasgow Colleges Environment and Sustainability Survey 2023

Executive summary

During the academic year 2022-23, we gathered data on Glasgow College students' and staffs' views, knowledge, and engagement with the climate crisis and sustainability. Our survey fulfilled the first milestone in the Scottish Colleges' Climate Action Roadmap, to which all Glasgow's colleges are committed. It also meets a primary objective in our college region's environment and sustainability strategy.

A total of 564 students, 167 support staff and 98 teaching staff answered their relevant questionnaires, meaning that this is the largest survey of college students' views on the environment and sustainability conducted in Scotland.

Our survey showed that all three groups have high levels of awareness and alignment with climate change but lower levels of understanding, active engagement and behaviour change.

Key findings

- Although all three colleges have made strategic commitments and taken action to address climate change, these actions and commitments are not fully recognised by their staff and students.
- Teaching staff echo the themes of the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan and of Glasgow's Just Transition. They believe that the need to address climate change will create career opportunities for those learners who develop the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Our surveys suggest, though, that many of our teaching staff are challenged by the extent of their knowledge, by a lack of clarity about a greener curriculum, and by their uncertainties about colleges' strategic commitment. Students are also uncertain about the effects that climate change will have on their careers.
- Most respondents, in all three groups, seem to be making limited voluntary lifestyle changes to help protect the planet.
- Although Glasgow's colleges, in line with the Scottish Government's policy, have committed to teaching the Sustainable Development Goals, our research suggests that this has, so far, had little impact.

Recommendations

Glasgow's colleges are meeting and exceeding many of their commitments on the environment and sustainability. They have also already completed some of the actions that this research leads us to recommend. However, this research represents views of students, teaching staff and support staff who experience these strategies and actions from their own perspectives.

Based on these perspectives, we have made five recommendations:

1. Many respondents were unaware of their colleges' existing strategies and actions. We, therefore, recommend that colleges deliver planned and consistent communications to clarify the purpose of these strategies, increase awareness, and generate engagement, promote values and drive change. The Green Kelvin brand was positively recognised by respondents from Glasgow Kelvin College and could act as a model.
2. The majority of staff and students believe that climate change will affect careers and we know that college graduates will power Glasgow's Just Transition. We, therefore, recommend that colleges clarify their commitment to the green skills agenda, identifying and supporting the development of sustainability teaching and learning as appropriate to each course and its accompanying career path.
3. We recommend that colleges commit, where possible, to staff training on wider sustainability and environmental issues and on subject-specific topics. Staff can then contribute to the development of sustainability modules.
4. We recommend that, where on-campus behaviour change is sought, estates and operations teams prioritise material change and use communications to support rather than effect those changes.
5. We also suggest that the Sustainable Development Goals be promoted and taught with environmental subjects.

Introduction

Throughout the academic year 2022-23, we conducted surveys about the environment and sustainability with students, teaching staff and support staff throughout the Glasgow College Region.

This research aimed to:

- Understand students' and staffs' levels of awareness, knowledge and engagement with the climate crisis.
- Gather views on how their college experience and education are preparing learners for careers in a time of climate change.
- Assess the college communities' appetite for changes that can make campuses, life on campus, and individuals' lifestyles more sustainable.
- Identify the communications needs and messages that will support leadership, learning and behaviour change.

We conducted separate surveys with students, support staff and teaching staff to inform discussions and recommendations on our key themes of leadership and governance, learning and teaching, estates and operations, and communications and behaviour change.

By sharing the results of this survey among our three colleges and the wider Scottish network, we are also fulfilling our data sharing objective.

Glasgow Clyde College and Glasgow Kelvin College also used the regional questionnaire to gather data on their Scope 3 travel emissions.

564 students, 167 support staff and 98 teaching staff answered their relevant questionnaires.

Methodology

Our surveys were designed after desk research into similar surveys conducted in schools, colleges and universities in the UK, US and Australia. They were also informed by Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Surveys, particularly the 2021 publication.

We conducted focus groups with support staff at City of Glasgow College and with the Students' Association at Glasgow Clyde College to test the content of our questionnaires. To ensure that our survey would contribute to the wider college network, we shared our questionnaires with EAUC.

Our questionnaires were distributed via teaching, support staff and students' associations and by our own canvassing in colleges.

554 students, 98 teaching staff and 157 support staff answered our questionnaires. As with all college surveys, we faced challenges in achieving participation. The scale of our responses and the clarity of the results suggest that we have captured the views of our population. However, we do not claim that every demographic or learning area is proportionately represented.

By working regionally, we have been able to deliver the largest survey of colleges' views on the environment and sustainability in Scotland. We have also been able to offer our three colleges specific data from their own respondents.

Student respondents

- Of the 554 students who responded to our questionnaire, 56% identified as female, with the predominant age group (50%) stating their ages as being between 18 and 25.
- 221 of our student respondents attended City of Glasgow College, 205 Glasgow Clyde College and 128 Glasgow Kelvin College.
- The most frequently reported areas of study were from: the creative industries (120 respondents), hospitality and food services (77 respondents) and construction (34 respondents). Together, these areas made up 42% of our sample. Other respondents represented the full scope of our curriculum.
- 34 ESOL students answered the survey.

Students' awareness of climate change

- 26 % of student respondents have learned about climate change as part of their course. Among our respondents, climate change education is strongest in: plumbing and heating, cooking and bakery, photography, art and design, jewellery, horticulture, construction management, business, civil engineering, industrial biotech and amongst ESOL students.
- 4% have had additional climate change training such as Climate Fresk or Carbon Literacy Training.
- 69% have had no climate change or carbon literacy training. Most of the students who had received no teaching about climate change were in the first year of their courses.
- To assess our students' awareness and alignment with the issues of climate change, they were asked if they believed that the climate was changing and how much they felt that human activities were a factor in that change.
- 83% of our students believe that the earth's climate is changing, with 3% believing that it is not, and the rest being uncertain. 85 % believe that human activities are the sole or main cause of the climate emergency.

- We also asked our respondents who they felt was to blame for climate change – ordinary people, governments in rich countries, governments in poor countries or industry and big business. While 45% of our students believe that big business is to blame for the climate crisis, more than half believe that ordinary people and governments in rich countries can make the biggest difference in combatting it. These results echo the Deloitte's research which characterises Millennials and Gen Z as 'calling for accountability and action' and 'advocates for change.'
- Students are optimistic (though less optimistic than staff) about society's ability to arrest climate change or its effects. 44% think that it is possible for the world to solve the problem if we make the right decisions now. A further 30% believe that we cannot stop climate change, but we can limit its impact if we act now. Only 5% believe that the climate crisis cannot be averted and that we should learn to live with its consequences.

Students' knowledge of climate change

While our student respondents were strongly aware of climate change, their knowledge was less strong. We asked how confident they were in their understanding of common climate change concepts: Net Zero, carbon emissions, COP26, fast fashion and the circular economy.

- 64% do not know what Net Zero is, although 67% are confident in their understanding of carbon emissions.
- 56% are confident in their knowledge of COP26, although its Glasgow location is likely to have influenced this.
- Understanding of fast fashion was split. About 1/3 of respondents (mainly male) knew nothing about it while a similar proportion (mainly female) felt that they were very well informed.
- 70% of our respondents have never heard of the circular economy and / or know nothing about it.
- 70% have little or no awareness of carbon offsetting.

These strengths and weaknesses in our respondents' knowledge, combined with their concern about the climate emergency, offer insights into the need for and potential content in teaching and learning.

Students' engagement and behaviour

When asked what everyday actions they took to reduce their personal impact on climate change, students did not report any strong commitment to lifestyle choices that might help to combat climate change.

- 21% avoid using single use plastics.
- 18% save gas and electricity.
- 17% buy only food that they know they will eat.
- 20% use public transport, walk or cycle instead of travelling by car.
- 13% buy secondhand goods.
- 8% eat less meat.

Our students are more supportive of college actions and interventions that can help to fight climate change. Even so, only two suggested measures (on reducing food waste and the use of single use plastics) were supported by more than half of our respondents.

Which of the following actions on climate change do you think that your college should take?	
Build climate change into everyone's learning.	43%
Deliver climate change teaching to those students whose careers will be most affected by it.	36%
Encourage sustainable travel options	46%
Reduce its use of single use plastics	55%
Reduce its use of fossil fuels for heating and lighting	40%
Reduce its food waste	52%
Only serve vegetarian food	16%
Make a public commitment to fighting climate change	32%
Keep you informed about climate change and how to fight it	45%

We can conclude that college students are reluctant to make changes to their own everyday lifestyles and are not actively interested in college policies.

Without the necessary individual or social motivations, colleges have a leadership role to play in effecting changes that will help them to achieve their own Net Zero targets and make a significant contribution to the fight against climate change.

These results also suggest that on-campus campaigns to encourage behaviour changes such as recycling or switching off lights and screens, are unlikely to be successful without more practical 'nudges'.

Respondents did see a role for students' associations in:

- Keeping them informed about climate change and how to fight it (44%)

- Making a public commitment to fighting climate change 28%
- Offering climate change training 23%

Careers and the climate crisis

Around half of our respondents do not know if climate change will affect their careers, with 25% believing that it will and 21% believing that it will not. By contrast, 97% of teaching staff are sure that the need to address climate change will have an impact on their students' careers.

Students' uncertainty is reflected in the majority (43%) view that their college course is not preparing them for such changes. 32% of respondents feel that their course might be preparing them for careers during a time of climate crisis and 21% feel that their learning is equipping them to cope with the impact of climate change on their careers.

This uncertainty is natural and prevalent throughout society and among policy makers. It does, however, create a space for learning and teaching to discuss and prepare for potential change.

Teaching Staff

98 members of our teaching staff completed their survey. 15 were from City of Glasgow College, 39 from Glasgow Clyde College and 44 from Glasgow Kelvin College. These respondents teach right across the curriculum.

Only 11 % of teaching staff who responded have received training or CPD Continuing Professional Development on climate change.

Their views on human activities as a cause and potential counter to climate change are broadly similar to those of their students, although teaching staff see governments in rich countries as most to blame for the crisis and as having the most power to address it.

Those teachers who responded are more optimistic than their students. 95% believe that climate change can be stopped or slowed by acting now.

Despite that optimism, their personal lifestyles are broadly similar to those of their students, differing significantly only in that they are twice as likely to use cars, probably because they have them, and 50% more likely to be eating less meat.

When asked if they felt that her colleges did enough to keep the informed about climate change and how to fight it, 18% of respondents answered 'yes'. 53% answered no and 28% said that they did not know.

Teaching staffs' knowledge of environmental issues

We asked our staff how confident they were about teaching some important environmental topics.

- Around half of our teaching staff felt that they could talk broadly about Net Zero, carbon emissions, COP 26, fast fashion and food waste.
- Around a third felt that they could explain the general principles of the circular economy or of carbon offsetting.

Supplementary questioning of those who felt confident in these topics revealed that much of that confidence was misplaced. For example, we asked the teaching staff to choose a definition of single use plastic and only 46% chose the correct answer.

Are single use plastics

- Plastic items that cannot be recycled? 18%
- Plastic items that are not made from recycled materials? 2%
- Plastic items that are designed to be used only once? 46%
- All of the above? 33%

87% of teaching staff respondents believe that students need to develop the skills and knowledge needed to address climate change, with 47% believing that these changes will create career opportunities.

- 47% of teaching staff respondents believe that society's need to address climate change will create positive career opportunities for their students.
- 18% that, if students develop the knowledge and skills needed to address climate change, their prospects will remain the same.
- 18% believe that, if their students do not develop these skills and knowledge, their career prospects will diminish.
- 4% believe that the climate emergency creates no additional skills needs for their students whose prospects will be unchanged.
- 10% are unsure of how these issues will affect their students.

Teaching staff are responding proactively to this analysis, with 99% including environmental and sustainability content that they feel is appropriate to their subjects.

I teach, refer to, or contextualise broad environmental and sustainability issues such as climate change and sustainable development but do not relate them directly to the subjects I teach.	40%
I need to prepare my students for sustainable working practices such as waste and recycling, reducing the use of fossil fuels, sustainable procurement, etc.	37%
I need to teach my students new skills and about new technologies to equip them for their future careers. (e.g., hydrogen engineering, sustainable food production)	20%

Teaching staff training

11% of teaching staff have received climate training and so the gaps in knowledge that our survey identified is understandable. As the green skills agenda becomes increasingly important, so does the need to ensure that our teaching staff are equipped to deliver the knowledge, skills and understanding that they feel their students will need.

The following training topics were of interest to teaching staff:

- Carbon literacy 16%
- Circular economy 20%
- Fast fashion 12%
- Food waste 13%
- Plastics 12%
- Sustainable development 18%

60% would prefer this training to be online and 78% want it to be part of the CPD.

Support Staff

167 support staff responded to our survey. 82 were from Glasgow Clyde College, 62 from Glasgow Kelvin College, 19 from City of Glasgow College and 4 from GCRB.

Support staff respondents mainly work in managerial positions and are, therefore, more aware of the environmental challenges in running large organisations. 20% of this group had received

some form of climate change training. These factors seem to have contributed to a more definite and confident set of responses.

92% of this group believe that climate change is wholly or mostly driven by human activities. Support staff see big business and industry as the main culprit and governments in rich countries as having the most power in addressing these issues.

They are on a par with teaching staff in believing that the climate crisis can be stopped or mitigated by acting now.

Broadly, support staff are slightly more confident in their knowledge of Net Zero, carbon emissions, COP26, Fast fashion, food waste, carbon offsetting and the circular economy than are teaching staff or students.

However, support staff are not significantly more likely than other groups to have made climate-friendly changes to their lifestyles.

Support staff are broadly interested in the same training subjects as are teaching staff, showing only slightly more interest in wider climate literacy learning.

Two thirds of them would like this training to be online and 72% think it should form part of their CPD.

This group is more aware of the actions that colleges are taking to address climate change issues.

The Sustainable Development Goals

Our surveys show that our colleges' commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is having limited impact on staff and students.

Although 49% of our teaching staff do want to teach about the Sustainable Development Goal, only 17% have done so. Consequently, 58% of our students know nothing about the SDGs, 34% know a little and 7% feel well-informed. Support staffs' responses are on a par with students'.

Leadership

Our surveys sought to measure awareness of our colleges' statements, commitments and actions on the climate emergency.

- 46% of staff were not aware of any strategic commitments.
- 19% could describe their colleges' strategic commitments.
- 17% responded by describing actions that related to estates, operations and transport.
- 5 people mentioned teaching practices and in their responses.

Teaching and support staff at Glasgow Kelvin College were most aware of their college's strategic commitments and actions on the environment, citing the Green Kelvin initiative.

We asked our students if they were influenced by the college's environmental leadership when they chose their course. Only 12% of respondents said that this had been a priority. A colleges' environmental credentials do not yet create a recruitment advantage.

However, 41% of student respondents said that, while this had not influenced their choice, they would be pleased to be part of an institution that had a statement and was acting on the climate emergency. A third believes that their college should make a public commitment to fighting climate change. It should be noted that 41% of student respondents were not interested in this subject.

Learning and Teaching

96% of teaching staff respondents believe that society's need to combat climate change will have an impact on their students' careers and that college learning will optimise that impact. 51% of teaching staff address broad environmental topics as part of their teaching. 47% relate these issues to students' potential workplace policies and practices. 25% are teaching new skills and knowledge that are necessary for particular career paths.

Students were less critical and less definite. 21% felt that their college education was preparing for careers in a time of climate crisis, 32% thought that it might be, and 43% thought that it was not.

Our surveys suggest that staff and students are confused about what knowledge and skills will be needed to support successful careers during a period of climate change. This means that staff and students cannot self-assess the adequacy of their learning, and this might account for some of the uncertainty in our responses,

There are many examples of excellence in the teaching of environmental topics throughout the Glasgow College network. City of Glasgow Colleges has developed a teaching model, now SQA accredited, that defines and delivers the knowledge and skills that professional cooks and bakers will need. This work could be a model for other faculties.

Estates and operations

Most of our respondents were aware of the climate crisis and aligned with the fight to avert it. We sought to identify the appetite for - and consequent likely success of - climate-friendly changes to campus life. However, most of our respondents are largely unwilling to make voluntary changes to their lifestyles and behaviours. For example, more than 60% of our respondents were aware that their college encourages active travel and 50% knew that single-use plastics are discouraged but this knowledge does not lead to changes in their lifestyles.

If colleges aim to improve their waste and recycling, power usage, food waste, active travel etc., they are unlikely to succeed by means of persuasion, information, or campaigns alone because individuals are unlikely to make choices or changes that inconvenience them. For example, City of Glasgow College imposed a 50p surcharge on hot drinks bought in disposable cups. This bold and innovative move had no impact on the sale of drinks or disposable cups.

The behaviour changes we seek are most likely to happen in response to material changes such as technological fixes, infrastructure and rules and regulations. The removal of bins from classrooms and offices and the resulting drop in waste is a strong example of material change prompting behaviour change.

This 'no options' approach does not mean that campaigns and information are not needed. They can support long term change, affect cultural norms and reduce the resentments that change can cause.

Communications

Our research shows that too many of our students and staff are unaware of the extent of leadership, teaching and learning and sustainable estates management that their college has achieved.

Only 29% of teaching and support staff believe that colleges communicate well enough on environmental and sustainability issues.

Communications alone, could help to address many of the uncertainties revealed in our research; helping to raise awareness, engage students and staff, drive sustainable practices and behaviours, show leadership, celebrate success, and create a culture that supports sustainability. The Green Kelvin initiative, which integrates communications with strategies and actions could provide a useful model for other colleges.

This is, however, a challenging time for every college's communications agenda and other priorities take precedence. The decision to develop coherent, complete and consistent communications about the environment and sustainability is, in itself, a strategic commitment.

Conclusion and recommendations

At a time when colleges face many challenges across all their activities, they are committed to environmental strategies that exceed their legal obligations. There are examples of excellence and enterprise in all three Glasgow colleges.

The Scottish Colleges' Statement of Commitment on the Climate Emergency and its accompanying roadmap and the skills demands of Glasgow's Just Transition add further work and challenges to the system.

Our surveys show that most students, support staff and teaching staff care about the environment and sustainability and value college leadership in this area but that they are not fully aware of the extent and nature of their colleges' commitments and actions. The colleges' commitment has not reached into the college experience for many of our students and staff.

There is a clear demand for teaching, learning and staff training on the environment and sustainability - from the development of the broadest understanding to very specific career skills. However, there are high levels of uncertainty about the impact that climate change and sustainability will have on skills needs and careers. There is a need for leadership in defining the role of colleges and their curricula in delivering skills for life and work.

Colleges' estates and operations teams are working hard to meet their legal and reach milestones on the Roadmap. Effecting changes in on-campus behaviour is difficult. Our surveys show that information and encouragement will support, but not effect, change and that more management teams should act firmly to force necessary behaviour.

While communications alone will not change lifestyles, they can support leadership, learning and teaching and estates and operations.

Although the Scottish Government and our colleges have committed to teaching the Sustainable Development Goals, our research suggests that this has not gained traction.

Our results lead us to five recommendations, all of which relate to commitment, communication, and clarity. These are in complete support of the colleges' commitments, strategies and actions.

1. Because so many respondents were unaware of their colleges' existing strategies and actions, we recommend that they deliver planned and consistent communications to clarify the purpose of these strategies, increase awareness, and generate engagement.
2. Because so many people believe that climate change will affect their career and because college graduates will power the Just Transition, we recommend that colleges clarify their commitment to the green skills agenda, identifying and supporting the development of sustainability teaching and learning as appropriate to each course and its accompanying career path.

3. We recommend that colleges invest in staff training on wider sustainability and environmental issues and on subject-specific topics. Staff can then contribute to the development of sustainability modules.
4. We recommend that, where on-campus behaviour change is sought, operations teams prioritise material change and use communications to support rather than effect those changes.
5. We recommend that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals be incorporated into combined environment and sustainability teaching and staff training.

[Link to student survey](#)

[Link to support staff survey](#)

[Link to teaching staff survey](#)