

StuCAN Starter Pack

Climate Action within Built Environment Education for Students and Student Groups

This document serves as a guide for student groups within the built environment, who are dissatisfied with the current approach of teaching 'sustainable' design. It contains a range of methods to starting a student climate action group at your university, and examples from existing groups, reflecting on their advantages and disadvantages. With this starter pack we hope to empower students giving you the tools to take collective, interdisciplinary action across built environment faculties.

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- ✉ education@architectscan.org
- 🌐 www.architectscan.org/stucan
- 📷 [@architectscan_student](https://www.instagram.com/architectscan_student)



1.1. Introduction

This document serves as a guide for student groups within built environment courses who are dissatisfied with their school's current approach to teaching 'sustainable' design in low carbon architecture. It provides a range of proven methods, examples and resources from existing Climate Action Groups; reflecting on their benefits and obstacles. The document aims to empower and encourage collective interdisciplinary action across the whole of built environment education.

1.2. What is ACAN?

The Architect's Climate Action Network (ACAN) is a network of individuals within the built environment industry taking action to address the twin crises of climate and ecological breakdown.

ACAN directs personal expertise and singular efforts towards a common goal - systemic change in the profession and the construction industry at large. Through collective action, ACAN is working to demand, instigate and propagate the transformation of the construction industry.

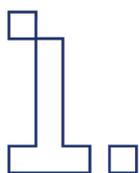


Fig. 1a - ACAN Structure Diagram

ACAN is non-hierarchical and inclusive, with members including architects, students, designers, engineers, journalists and more. We regularly host open meetings with hundreds of attendees, where individuals are empowered to act and create change through political campaigning, direct action, public engagement, research and knowledge sharing.

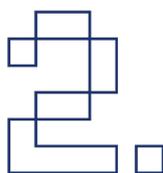
1.3. Principles

ACAN operates on three central principles, which form the basis of all our campaigns and efforts. However, we feel that each Student Group should define their own central principles that align with their agendas and ideologies. This document aims to assist and facilitate student activism, not prescribe it. ACAN's aims are:



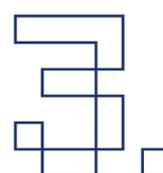
Decarbonise Now

- Zero Carbon
- Energy Use
- Embodied Carbon
- Building Performance
- Evaluation



Ecological Regeneration

- Ecology
- Circular Economy
- Natural Materials



Cultural Transformation

- Climate Justice
- History & Theory
- Social Justice & Equity

Since all work is voluntary, there should be no pressure or obligation for individuals to commit their time and efforts. With the high demands of university studies, it is extremely important to first prioritise your well-being and mental health.

1.4. ACAN Past Actions

ACAN Education is one of the largest and most active of ACAN's thematic groups, made up of around 45 active members and 4 coordinators. Our primary focus is to reform education, actively seeking to increase levels of climate literacy in built environment courses across the UK.

Through our [Climate Curriculum Campaign](#), we have undertaken numerous tasks, such as launching a student survey, creating a Climate Curriculum Toolkit (refer to section 4.1), and running a series of climate workshops. ACAN Education has also successfully hosted over 160 tutors and 30 heads of schools at various workshops over the Summer. The appetite for these workshops has been insatiable, and is an aspect we now continue with students across the country. Therefore, by employing a variety of strategies aimed at both students and staff, we seek to tackle change from multifarious perspectives, ensuring both a top-down and bottom-up approach.

2.1. Starting A Student Action Group

A Student Action Group is a collective of students that works to achieve climate action within their built environment department through a range of actions. Action Groups are encouraged to adapt the methods discussed in this document and devise new strategies specific to their built environment school.

Benefits:

Establishing a Student Action Group allows students to lobby the department in a continuous and effective manner. As a formal group of students, roles can be designated to ensure that pressure is sustained and holistic across built environment education. Moreover, ACAN will connect you to existing Climate Groups, enabling the dissemination of resources and advice from various groups across the country.

Overcoming Obstacles:

Effectiveness can rely on a (sometimes small) group of students working continuously to address shortfalls in their education. Time commitment can be minimised through the delegation of roles and responsibilities, allowing individuals members to contribute when they have more time, allowing others to take a break to prevent burnout. Collective action will always lead to more impactful and lasting change than individual action.

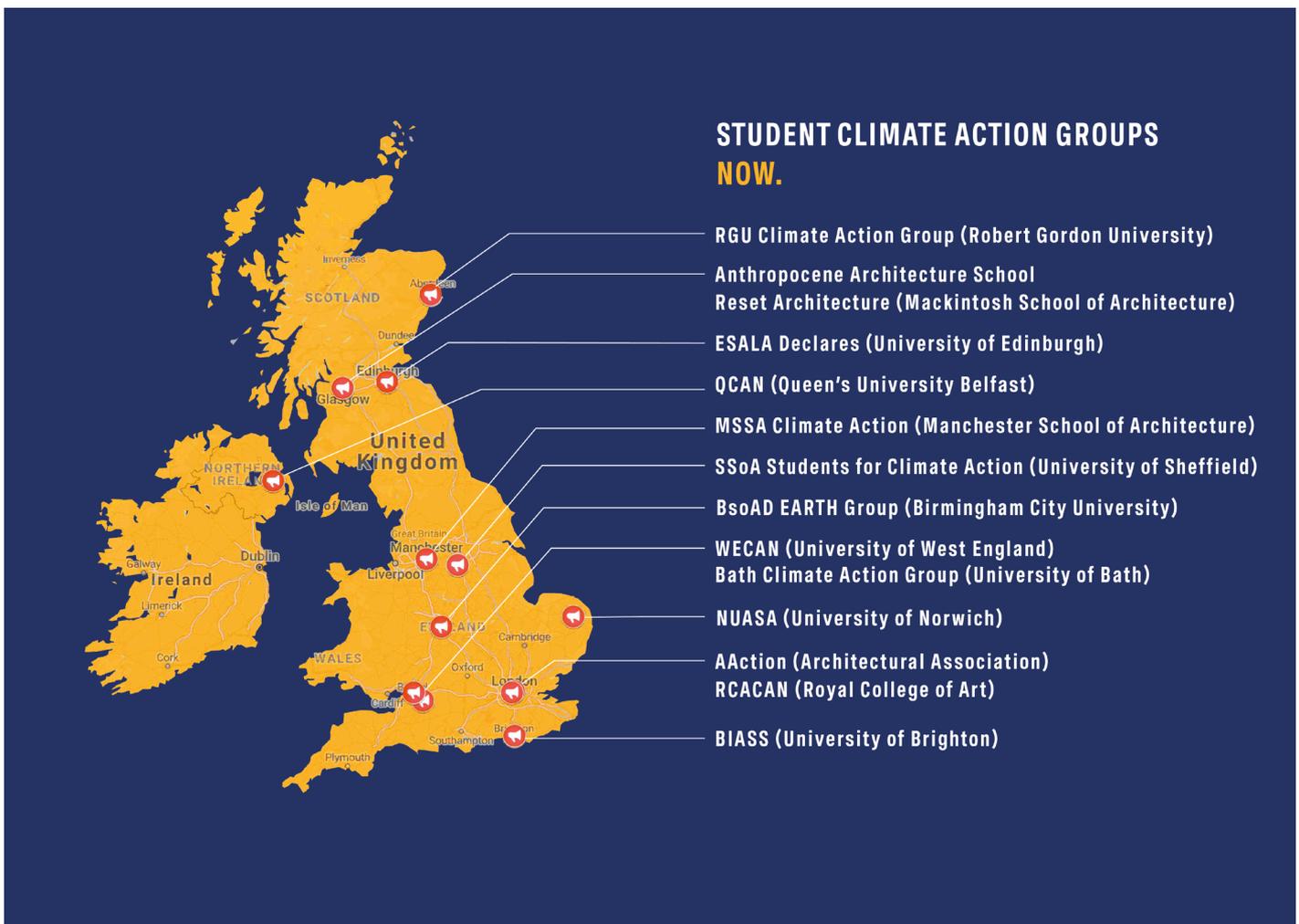


Fig. 2a - Existing Student Climate Action Groups in the UK (March 2021)

2.2. Organisational Structure

There are a range of options regarding the structure of Student Groups:

- Independent of the University
- Within Students Union
- Within Built Environment Society
- Within Built Environment Department

Detached from University:

Establishing a group without a formal affiliation gives maximum flexibility with organisation set up.

Within Student Union:

Setting up within a SU may be beneficial by providing a predetermined structure, funding strategy and succession plan for when existing student members graduate. It would also be beneficial for establishing a relationship with the university and other sustainability action groups on campus. There is a longer process associated with setting up within a SU and it may be beneficial to initially set up independently before seeking affiliation, depending on the needs of the group.

Within Built Environment Society:

Adding a committee position(s) in an the existing Built Environment / Architecture Society can provide an established structure and continuation strategy for a group. This may be the easiest way to set up a group and can be initiated by a small number group of students.

Within Built Environment Department:

Another option is to create a group within the department as a formal collaboration between staff and students. This may enable the most effective dialogue with the department, but limit the potential for lobbying and risk being caught up in university bureaucracy.

“We approached UWE Architecture Society over summer to see if they would be interested in starting up a student climate action group which they were very enthusiastic about. The appointment of sustainability officers for the society made it easy for us to get students on board through the society which already had established members and social media accounts”

Nicola - WE CAN!



Structure / Committee

Each student group is likely to gain varying numbers of supporting members. Whilst the group must remain non-hierarchical, assigning positions internally will help your student group organise itself and maintain support. Roles may require varying time commitments and those opting in ought to be aware of this. Equally you may find you need more/less roles than outlined below, this is a suggested framework only.

Roles + Positions

High Level Commitment roles include: **'co-leads'** (organises meetings, generates agendas, maintains an overview of the groups short and long term aims), and **'liaisons'** (engage with students and tutors through formal and informal communications).

Medium Level Commitment roles include: **'social media'** (outreach on public platforms, and internal social communication e.g. WhatsApp), and **'design team'** (create graphical content, manage website etc.)

Low Level Commitment roles include: **'treasurer'** (keep track of funding and expenditures), **'attendees'** (members who attend weekly meetings).



Fig. 2b - Organisation of WE CAN!
(University of West England)

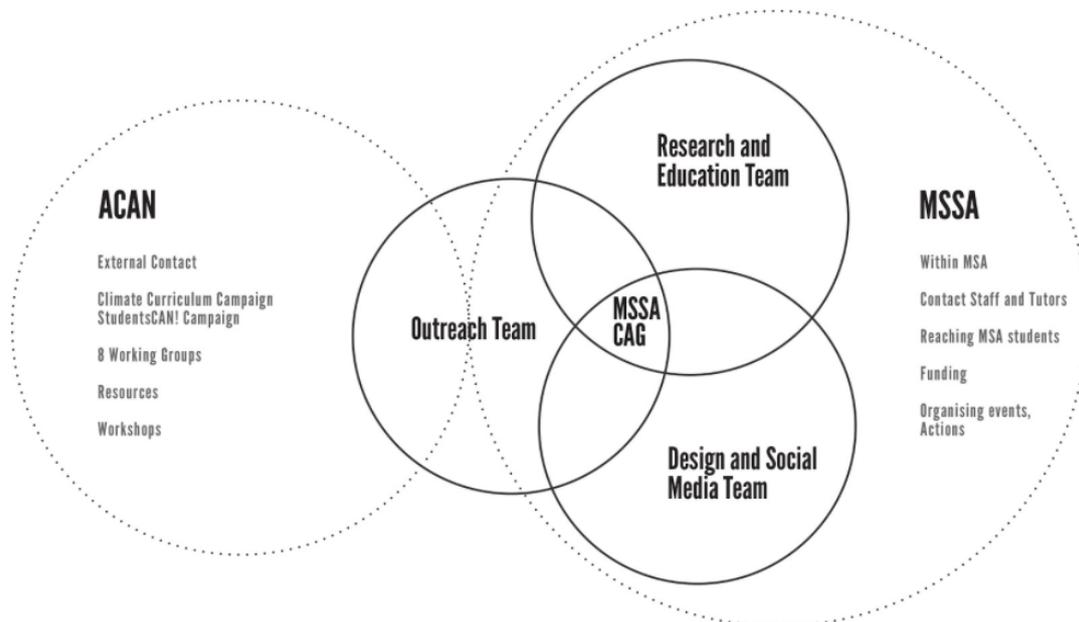


Fig. 2c - Organisation of MSSA
Climate Action Group

Continuation Strategy

It is important to consider the legacy of a Student Climate Group, ensuring that the group can continue once the current members graduate. This can be achieved by appointing students in non-graduating years on to the committee, ensuring a mix of both undergraduate and masters students, and establishing a continuation strategy from the outset. Longevity of student groups will allow for maximum impact. Organising group work, communications and documents through Google Drive (See 2.4) can assist with handover and allow for the continuation of events between years.

2.3. Student / Staff Relationship

Working Relationship:

Student groups are usually set up without any input from staff, but they could involve staff informally or as a truly collaborative student/staff group.

Towards a Cohesive Partnership:

There are a variety of barriers to implementing a climate literate education and preparing for such dialogue with staff may be beneficial. Common viewpoints that may need to be addressed are listed:

- The department may believe that they are already doing enough
- Departments prepare students to be climate literate by the time they become fully qualified, with different goals at the different RIBA stages
- Increasing marks for sustainability may take important marks away from another area and be a difficult process to change, especially in the context of the RIBA accreditation
- More time spent on sustainability adds increased pressure on students who are already under significant stress

Approach to Lobbying:

When staff are fully supportive of the student group, their position may be beneficial in enabling easy communication with and change within the department. If staff are not as supportive, a separate/independent student group may have more lobbying power.

Student / Staff Involvement:

While the involvement of staff may be beneficial to your student action group, be wary of staff dominating the conversation. For notes on effective meeting facilitation see section 2.4. We would suggest having regular meetings with staff, whether they are directly involved with the group or not. For example, having regular student meetings, and one fortnightly session to review and discuss with staff.



2.4. Administration / Logistics

Funding

Funding allows you to set up websites, invite guest speakers and increases the impact of your student group. If you set up your student group as an add-on to your Student Architecture Society, you may be able to receive funding through them, as they will typically be financially supported by the university on an annual basis. Furthermore, sustainability or climate literacy groups may be able to access funding from your Student Union, who have independent funding. Other sources include:

- University-Wide Sustainability Pot
- Head of Department
- Competitions / Alternative Funding Applications

2.4.1. Communication (Internal)

WhatsApp / Slack / Signal:

It is essential to establish an effective method of internal communication within groups. **WhatsApp** is widely used and easy to establish, though privacy concerns have been recently flagged. **Signal/Telegram** are other alternatives to WhatsApp. **Slack** can be a more formal approach and different channels allow easy organisation where multiple WhatsApp groups may become confusing.

"We use Slack to communicate, which available on browser, desktop app and phone app. We divide our regular work streams into channels (social media, events, podcasts, communications...) to keep conversations organised. Everyone can see every public channel, so we can effectively communicate between working groups and chip-in on others conversations. We try keep as much communication as possible on these (rather than DM-ing people)"

"We have a WhatsApp group for the whole student climate action group and then other WhatsApp groups for each working group"

Nicola - WE CAN!

Eleanor - SSoA



Google Drive / Gmail:

Google Drive allows easy organisation of documents, slides and presentations and online editing. It can be made public to the whole group to ensure transparency, but private folders for admin can also be created where privacy may be an issue, such as the collation of contact details.

Facilitating Meetings (Adapted from Extinction Rebellion by ACAN):

At every meeting, it is beneficial to assign a **notetaker** and **facilitator**. The role of the facilitator is to ensure everyone gets to speak and that the discussion stays on topic of the agenda. The facilitator is not responsible for generating ideas for the group; discussions are a shared effort. Time keeping is critical. It is the role as facilitator to make sure the sessions move through the questions/ agenda, so don't be shy to move the session on as per the recommended question timings.

Each group is likely to have a different dynamic which you will have to react to. i.e. people may be shy at first, or there might be a few people who have a lot to say. Part of your role as facilitator is to encourage everyone's voices to be heard and make sure it is a level playing field.

The role of the notetaker is to record the salient points of discussion, any resolutions or answers to outstanding questions, and importantly document the actions that have arisen from the meeting, including when these actions should be completed, and who by.

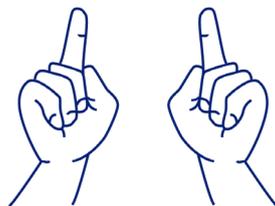
Hand Signals:

Hand signals are a great leveler and will help you manage meetings and allow those that have something to share to be heard. Please see below the typical hand gestures that ACAN adopts in all of our meetings, and you may wish to use them in your meetings too:



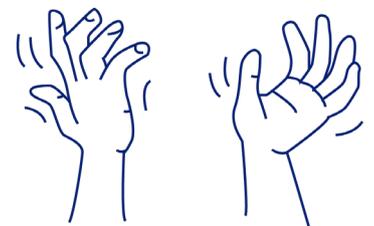
Point

If you have something to say, raise your hand. The facilitator will take note and come round to you in order



Direct Point

Skips the queue to directly respond to the last comment - try not to abuse this!



Agreement

Shake your hands up high if you are in agreement with what is being said. (Fingers pointing down shows you disagree)



2.4.2. Communication (External)

Social Media:

Instagram can be your public facing platform, keeping people indirectly involved with the group and up to date with what's going on. Recent experience has shown Instagram to be particularly effective in engaging the student community. These followers could be other student action groups, educators, architecture firms, students, alumni etc, following these people when you set up your account is a great way to start.

"As we were unsure what to call our climate action group at UWE, we ran a logo and name competition when we launched the climate group. This was a great way to get students involved at the beginning of the semester as we received about 12 entries which were all great. We then got ACAN Education to vote on their favourite using a poll"

"We find Instagram is a good way of keeping engaged with students, but Twitter is helpful in engaging with the professional, research and wider activist community. Both platforms are therefore beneficial to the group"

Eleanor - SSoA

Nicola - WE CAN!



Fig. 2d - WE CAN! Logos

Website:

A website can be an easy way to effectively organise your resources, events and aims. You can create a range of free websites using wordpress or other similar sources. Creating a website can be a good use of funding, and can also be used to embed other social media, such as Instagram.

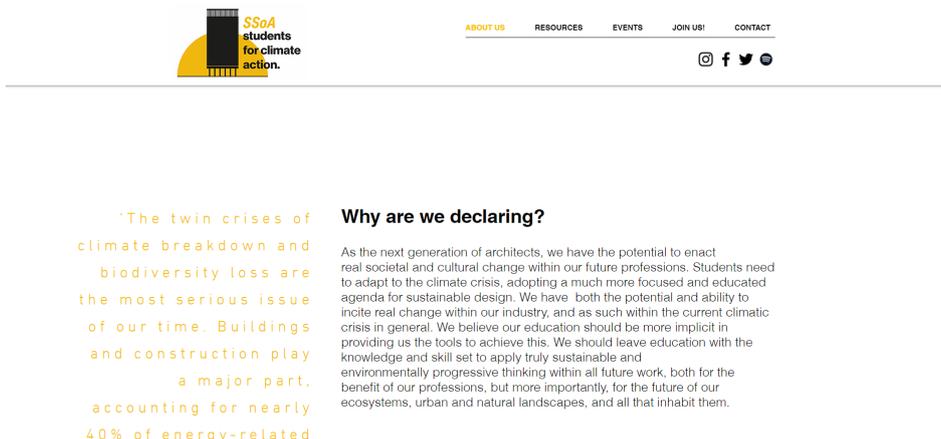


Fig. 2e - Sheffield Students for Climate Action Website

2.5. Mandate

Mandates and manifestos are invaluable resources for outlining your agenda, helping to streamline and clarify your aims. ACAN actively encourages the use of mandates, with each thematic group and campaign centred around one. We would strongly advise creating one that is tailored to your institution. We recommend covering specific goals, both short and long-term, with a clear strategy for how it can be achieved. A mandate will be a crucial element with regards to recruitment, helping new volunteers easily understand your position and aims.

Example Mandate:

www.ssoaclimateaction.com/manifesto

Mandate Writing:

www.archdaily.com/921760/how-to-write-an-architectural-manifesto

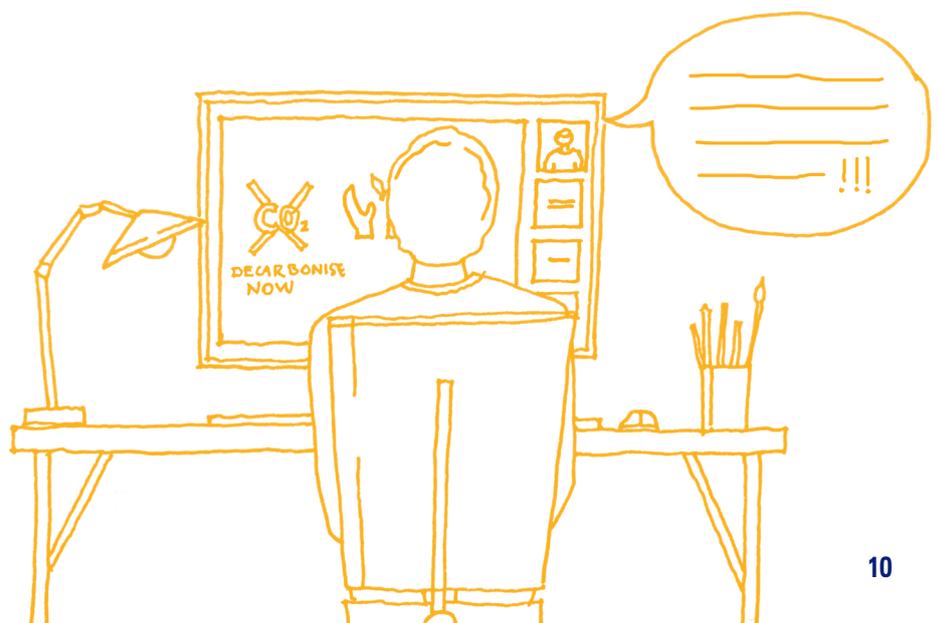
2.6. Launch Event / Lectures

After setting up an action group, the launch event can be a great way to invite more members and articulate the aims of the group to the wider university. It is important to keep this event accessible for everyone and demonstrate how students have agency. One example is to attend a StuCAN workshop or run your own (See 3.3., 3.4.). Active publicity is crucial at this stage; you can use your social media, email, ask other societies or staff (if you have a close working relationship) to re-share your posts to reach as many people as possible.

Lectures can be very beneficial for students to learn about topics not covered in the curriculum. They are also great events to inspire and keep up the conversation about sustainability in the built environment. Do not be afraid to reach out to speakers you have in mind, however, you might need funding for their invite (See 2.4.). ACAN has a range of speakers who we can put you in contact with. It is essential that the speakers represent the range of students and their interests at your university.

“For our first event, we asked StuCAN for a workshop. It was a nice way to launch our action group in the school and at the same time start the discussion about what are the obstacles to introduce climate literacy teaching and how could these be overcome at Manchester”

Mylan - MSSA Climate Action Group



2.7. Climate Emergency Forum

Assembly that brings students, senior staff members and visiting lecturers together to discuss and raise action points for addressing the climate emergency within the architecture school. A list of action points can be 'ratified' at the event for implementation post-event.

Benefits:

- Involves all decision makers and, when student led, allows for easy agreement on principles and methods that can be implemented going forwards
- Students can hold heads of department accountable
- Senior Staff can voice concerns or bureaucratic challenges that are perceived to hinder improved climate education

Example:

University of Bath Climate Forum's
(further information available in resource pack
- contact us to learn more)

Overcoming Obstacles:

- Discussions can be long winded and actions may not be progressive enough
- Crucial actions may be missed if they are not raised in the discussion.
- If points agreed do not go far enough, easy for the department to say that this is what was agreed by university students and we are doing enough

"Organising Climate Forum's at the University of Bath allowed us to use a participatory approach involving both staff and students, to identify pathways for decarbonisation. This collaborative approach gets everyone in the same room to share their perspectives and initiate change"

Matthew - Co-Organiser of Bath Climate Forum's

2.8. School Wide Sustainable Curriculum Survey

A school wide survey answered by students to assess the sufficiency of education regarding sustainability within the architecture school. Questions can cover satisfaction of students and how well prepared they feel to enact sustainable design as well as opinions on how their education could be improved. Results can identify areas in the curriculum that need urgent improvement and can suggest useful actions for both students and staff.

Benefits:

- Ensures that all students have a chance to express their opinion
- Results can be used as powerful evidence when lobbying for change in the department
- May also be used in wider faculty (level above department), to aid discussions around changes to curriculum, staffing, funding etc.
- Beneficial for staff to get specific feedback on this issue and suggestions for improvements
- Can raise awareness among students and encourage action
- Can be used to make the climate action group more widely known in the university

Example:

[Sheffield Students for Climate Action](#)

Overcoming Obstacles:

- To make the survey credible, you will need to collect email addresses to prevent repeat fill-outs and ensure students are from your university
- Needs to be answered by a large number of students to have accuracy about the general views
- Should ask the relevant questions in a concise form (shouldn't be too long)
- Might need different versions for undergraduates and masters

Google Form Template (Available [HERE](#)):

Please ensure you do not edit the form, but instead copy the form and edit the copy if you want to use it as a template. Make sure to adapt it and make specific for your own school

STUDENTS CAN

School Wide Sustainable Curriculum Survey Template

Survey aimed at assessing the current opinion of the quality of sustainability education within xxx department. Please copy and edit template to suit needs of your built environment school. Please send any questions to education@architectscan.org

*Required

Please type your university email address to confirm you are a student studying at [name of university] *

Your answer

What course are you studying?

- Architecture
- Civil Engineering
- Interior Design
- Landscape Architecture
- Urban Planning
- Other:

Fig. 2f - Curriculum Survey Google Form Template

2.9. Existing Student Groups

Student Groups are rapidly setting up and establishing across the UK. Utilising the linked interactive map, you can find the contact details of each group to learn from them and connect.

ACAN Education Map:
[Google Map Link](#)

Working Collaboratively with other Student Groups:

ACAN has established a resource folder to share the knowledge of student groups as well as a WhatsApp group with representatives from each group to allow effective collaboration, learning and action. If you would like to get involved or have any questions, please contact us via Instagram or Email (education@architectscan.org)

3.0 - Individual Action



3.1. Letter to Head of School

Letter, either signed by as many members of a university cohort as possible, or sent individually by a number of students to their head of school to express a desire for their university to improve teaching around sustainability. May or may not include a set of action points depending on the institution and the knowledge of students. Ultimately students will have some idea of points to be implemented, but the department should use the sustainability experts they employ for reference.

Benefits:

Relatively quick method that highlights dissatisfaction among students and a desire for change and if a large number of signatures/emails are sent to the senior leadership, this places them under a significant amount of pressure to act.

Overcoming Obstacles:

It is easy for departments to say they will act on any points raised and in turn fail to implement these. A group of students should continue to hold the department accountable and ensure that progress is made in response to the demands. Without this, a letter is unlikely to achieve systemic change.

ACAN Student Letter Template:

<https://www.architectscan.org/curriculum-campaign>

3.2. Meeting with Head of School / Tutors

Meeting with the head of school as a continuation of the letter. Ultimately this meeting might lead to an establishment of a formal student group.

Benefits:

- Educators are involved in writing the curriculum and therefore can change the fabrics of education
- May be offered funding
- Opportunity to establish a positive, collaborative dialogue, setting the right tone

Overcoming Obstacles:

- Could highlight existing resistance to change
- Course leaders are likely to know the administrative process and fear how lengthy it is



3.3. Attending StuCAN Workshops

StuCAN will run formal workshops which we invite you all to attend. The workshops will give an overview of our campaign and are a great opportunity to learn about and engage with the movement. Please invite all those within your institution, both students and tutors, who are interested to take part in your climate campaign. Keep an eye on the [StuCAN events page](#) for StuCAN workshop details.

StuCAN Assistance:

If you would like further assistance from a member of the StuCAN network feel free to get in contact with us and we would be happy to support you by meeting with your group or attending your own launch event (see section 2.6 for information on launch events).

3.4. How to Run Your Own Workshop

The launch event (see section 2.6) is a great way to kick start your own climate action group. If publicised broadly you might expect to see large numbers of attendees initially. However, once the launch event has taken place it can be a good idea to have a structured plan in place to continue engaging those who are interested. A tactic that other student groups have used is running weekly workshops which enable continued discussions.

Logistics:

Refer to section (2.41.) for information on facilitating workshops as well as note taking. We recommend using the same time and day each week to host your meetings. Before setting a time and day each week check your relevant timetables. If there are multiple courses which you may want to attend (BA,MA,MSc) try to figure out a time which suits everyone.

Example Agenda Template:

Download, edit and use as a template
[Available HERE](#)

3.5. Initiatives

Initiatives are another way to maintain engagement. Below are a few suggested examples which have been tried and tested by other Student CAN groups. However you may want to begin sharing responsibilities and encouraging other students to suggest and carry out their own initiatives. By sharing responsibilities your peers will feel empowered and your own workload can be reduced.

Examples:

1. Weekly workshops to discuss progression (see section 3.4 above).
2. Logo design competition. Example [brief Westminster CAN](#)
3. Debate topics to be researched and presented by students during weekly workshops. Could be held bi-weekly/monthly. For suggested debate topics refer to [ACAN Working Groups](#).

4.0 - Resources

4.1. Climate Curriculum Toolkit:

ACAN has compiled a Climate Curriculum Toolkit intended to be a starting point for conversations around how built environment curriculum's and specifically Architecture courses may further incorporate climate literacy. The Toolkit is intended to be used by anyone seeking change within schools of architecture, including tutors, students, course leaders and heads of schools.



CLIMATE ACTION RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS OF ARCHITECTURE

[Education Toolkit](#) and [Educators Workshops](#)

Fig. 4a - ACAN Education Toolkit

ACAN Education Toolkit:

<https://www.architectscan.org/education-toolkit>

4.2. Padlet:

We have also curated a collection of resources for students and tutors.

ACAN Education Resources:

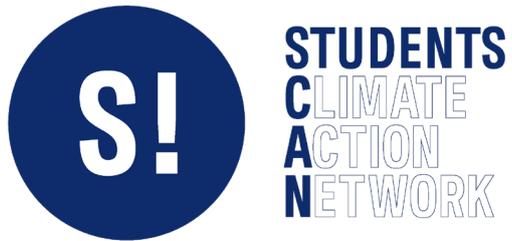
<https://padlet.com/acaneducation/resources>

4.3. AAS Library:

The Anthropocene Architecture School (run by frequent collaborator and RIBA Rising Star 2020, Scott McAulay) is a fantastic resource for all students and built environment professionals.

Anthropocene Architecture School:

<https://www.instagram.com/anthropocene.a.s/>



-  education@architectscan.org
-  www.architectscan.org/stucan
-  [@architectscan_student](https://www.instagram.com/architectscan_student)