



COP26 Discussions Project
Coordinator: Montague Jones

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University of St Andrews Environmental Discussions Survey Report

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Introduction

The following report demonstrates the desire of the St Andrews student population to transition to a sustainable future. This report concludes an 11-question survey sent to students using a variety of social media platforms. The survey aimed to determine the students’ perspective on climate change, environmental topics they would like to see addressed and what they wish to gain from COP26 in Glasgow. The survey is the beginning of a bottom-up approach to the University’s discussion regarding climate change. It achieved 134 responses, enough to generalise the survey responses to the whole University. Out of the 134, 120 were undergraduates from 20 schools, and 14 were post-graduates.

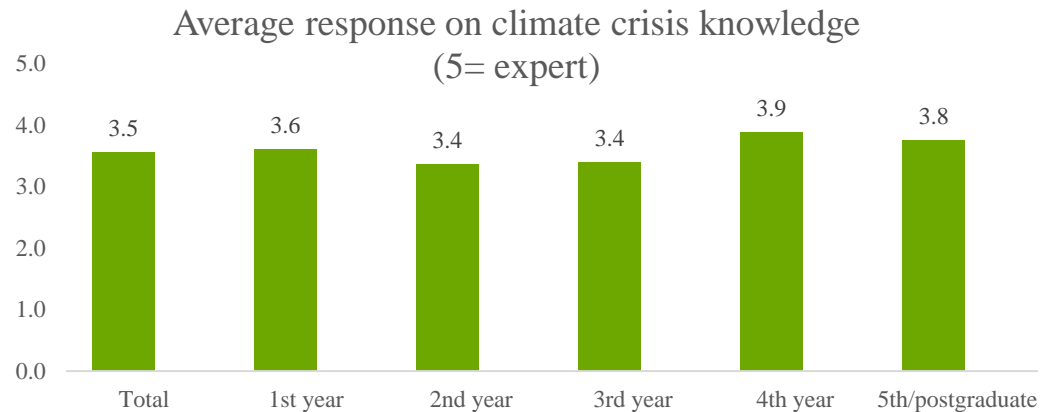


Fig. 1: Student response when questioned how knowledgeable they were on climate change.

Student awareness of COP26

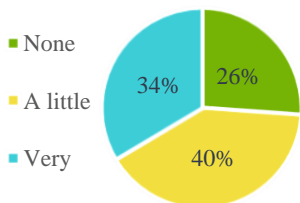


Fig. 2: Student response on how informed they felt about COP26.

Student Responses

Climate Change Conscious?

The average student rating was 3.5 out of 5 regarding how knowledgeable students were on the climate crisis, where 5 was an “expert”. Both second and third years fell below this average with an average score of 3.4 while fourth years had the highest, an average of 3.9. Figure 1 shows a comparison between the year groups, with fourth years with the highest average of 3.9. Around 75% of the responses stated they had heard of COP26, with 34% feeling informed about the upcoming conference, as shown in figure 2. Over 90% of

students wished to learn more about climate change, with a total of two responses saying they did not.

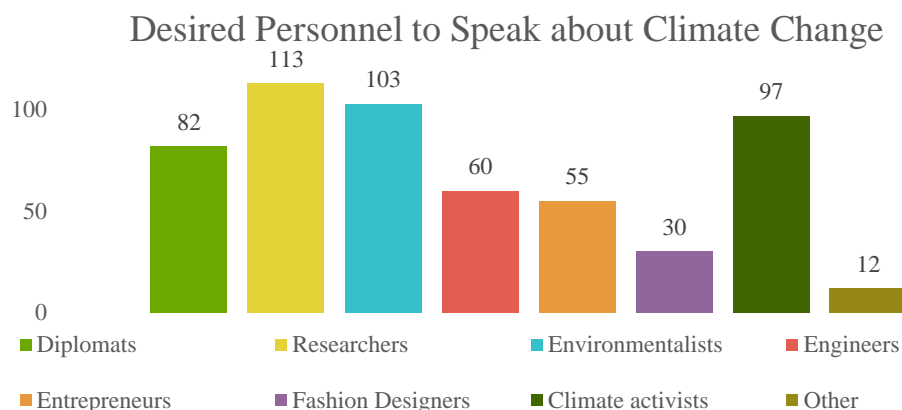


Fig. 3: Student preference on types of personnel to speak about climate change.

COP26 Discussions Vision

Students answered questions about the topics around climate change. Determining what they would like to learn about, whom they wish to hear from, and the presentation style. Figures 3, 4 and 5 are representations and comparisons between the various information gathered on these questions. The three dominant topics students wanted to learn more about were alternative energy sources, environmental justice and carbon management. Environmental Law was also in high demand. There were other suggestions, with students wanting information to spread through emails, infographics, multimedia platforms, and consistent webpage updates. The University has produced a new sustainability webpage designed by Hanna Lundstrom, the Sustainability Coordinator. The new site will emplace these suggestions. Students requested researchers, environmentalists, and climate activists to visit St Andrews and speak. Diplomats had high praise as well. Students also mentioned creating a space for St Andrews alumni and climate innovators. The majority of students wished to learn about the climate change crisis through lectures and discussion. Some students suggested a preference for online presentations, a course-of-action potentially selected depending on the current Covid-19 situation.

Climate Change Presentation Style

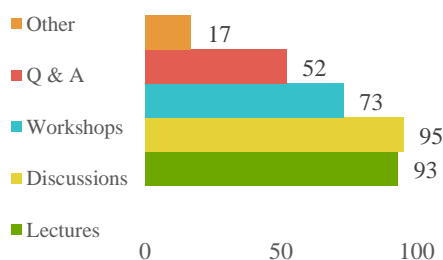


Fig. 4: Student preference on presentation style.

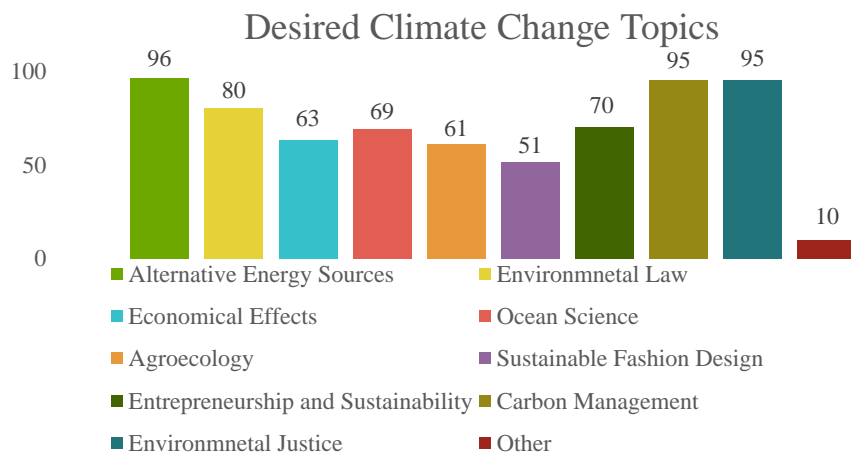


Fig. 5: Student response on preferred climate change topics.

“The smaller projects are vital in helping educate students on climate change.”

Students Call for Action

The last questions invited students to voice how they wish to be involved with the University’s transition to a sustainable future, what they would like to gain from COP26, and improvements made within the University. The feedback was very positive. Most students expressed a desire to be involved with the University and were happy that the University set an ambitious goal to become net-carbon zero by 2035. Students expect the University to utilise COP26 to educate the community more about the climate change crisis- by hearing from renowned speakers and activists from diverse backgrounds. Students also viewed it as an opportunity for the University to demonstrate our research and have a national presence to pressure leaders to act. However, students did see a need for improvement within the University. Many students felt that they do not have a significant voice when it comes to the University’s actions in sustainability. Therefore, students believe they play a restricted part in the University becoming sustainable. Students would like the University to have an environmental presence and support various small student projects currently happening on- and off-campus. Some students believe the University is only moving towards a sustainable future through massive projects. While these projects are necessary, encouraging and supporting the small projects are equally as important. The smaller projects are vital in helping educate students on climate change. These projects allow people to contribute to the solution and, therefore, ignite and maintain a desire to further the community in becoming more sustainable.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey demonstrates positive feedback and support for the University moving towards a sustainable future. It reveals a picture of what the students wish to see around COP26. Both the students and the University are moving towards a common goal. However, the survey exposes a potential breakdown in communication and unity, revealing a divide between the administrators and students. Such a division is not uncommon but will need addressing if St Andrews is serious about becoming a net-zero carbon-emitting university by 2035.

The next action is to select speakers using the survey to decide the number of speakers targeted in each topic and the presentation style to come to the University and speak about climate change. Speakers will represent the issues students want to learn most. The University is exploring a proposal to offset the emissions of the speaker’s travel to and from St Andrews. The carbon emission offset plan would put to practice our goal of offsetting student’s travel emissions. It would show the University is serious about sustainability by putting our ambition to action.