

## What sustainability means for our students

Good evening, my name is Molli and I am the President of Reading University Students' Union. We are separate to the University but work very closely on collaborative projects that aim to enhance the student experience and make the University a better place for staff, students and the local community. Part of my job is to be the lead on sustainability at RUSU, ensuring it is embedded and considered in all of our actions. I've been asked by Dan [Fernbank] to come and talk to you this evening about what sustainability means for our students.

I want to start by saying sustainability is at the heart of the University and RUSU; recently I think this has been driven by the student desire to live more sustainably and for our campuses to be more environmentally friendly. As a student at the University of Reading who graduated in July, I've certainly noticed that sustainability has become a higher priority for our whole community and I'm going to speak for the next few minutes about what we are achieving together.

I kicked off my time in office by creating a sustainability campaign called Make your Mark which has been driven by our students. The aim in this is that students at Reading have a better experience and can feel proud as a result of improved sustainable awareness alongside the university investing ethically and sustainably. This aim derived from initial student feedback on the issue and interestingly the number one reason students wanted our campus to be more sustainable was so they could be proud to be a student at Reading. I include myself in this; one of the reasons I came to Reading was because of our gorgeous campus and I want to ensure prospective students get to enjoy it too. Additionally, in an online survey completed by 300 students, 96% wanted campus to be more sustainable so we were confident of the demand for my campaign.

I think my first realisation over how important sustainability was to students was when the University and RUSU participated in the global climate strike back in September where around 200 staff and students came out in support of the strike. Given this was out of term time, it really surprised me to see how many of our community came together and set a great precedent for the year ahead.

The first success of this campaign has been my work with the Environment and Ethics part time officer who is an elected student. Bailey has pushed for the University to affiliate with Electronics Watch who ensure responsible public procurement and maintain the rights of electronics workers. After conversations between RUSU, the sustainability department and procurement at the University we are now moving forward to affiliate with Electronics Watch. I think what is most powerful in this win, is that the idea started with a student and is a great example of how students can bring positive change to this University.

After demanding for the University to change its processes, RUSU recognised that we needed to lead by example alongside supporting our students. We have started up an Environments committee to address the issues in our building and part of this was to ask Dan and his team to carry out an energy review to the building. As a result, we now have plans to improve our lighting and to add solar panels to the building. We have also signed

our staff up to the JUMP platform, carried out our own environmental audit to create measures for success and most recently have signed up to the Green Impact award so we can gain formal recognition for our hard work.

On the student facing side of our changes, we have started up a brand-new Environment and Ethics student network, which provides a termly space for students who have an interest in sustainability to meet up. To support this, I am currently speaking with the alumni team at the University to setup a green fund where students can apply for funding to run events, projects and initiatives. This idea to set up a green fund partly came from student feedback.

We have two very active and engaged student societies at Reading who have raised awareness and ran events in order to improve sustainable awareness. The Zero Waste society have successfully run two clothes swaps which were open to staff and students, accumulating over 300 pieces of clothing which may have otherwise been thrown away. During Green Fest, a collaborative week of events between RUSU and the University, they ran a Night of Sustainable business where sustainable companies were invited in to talk to and inspire students. Most recently, the society were on BBC news talking about their sustainable Christmas formal which asked guests to come along in outfits found in charity shops and used decorations created from the greenery around campus.

Similarly, the Climate Interaction group ran an event where academics from various fields across the University were invited to discuss how their work connected to sustainability. What was particularly interesting about this event, is that it didn't just include academics connected to science but other fields such as literature and humanities.

Green Fest was a brilliant 3 days of events which we ran last term and included energy centre tours, a bio-diversity walk and a spin class in the dark – all aimed at engaging students with sustainability. It also included my student led workshop which had in attendance the Veggie and Vegan society, our student community assistants, RBC, Extinction Rebellion, Student Eats, People and Planet, Climate Interaction Group and the Zero Waste society.

We wanted to make sure that we were engaging all our students, regardless of their level of interest. With the Climate Interaction group, they are PHD students who care passionately about the science behind climate change so are far more invested in sustainability. For many students, the level of interest is far less so we have run monthly initiatives where students can make small changes. December saw a social media push on second hand clothing, January focussed on sustainable food choices and next month will engage students with thinking about printing less. These initiatives have partly been driven by student feedback and can be easily embedded into a students' life whilst collectively making a big difference.

Another fantastic example of sustainable interest in students are the ideas that have come through RUSU's online democratic platform Change it! The first which passed an all student vote and was mandated to the President for two years was to change drinking straws from

plastic to biodegradable and to charge 5p. This was successfully implemented and is now business as usual within RUSU and this idea simply started off with a student submission. The second which has passed has been to offer environmentally friendly products. We have two outlets across campus that offer a range of products and RUSU is about to trial a click and collect service through a local supplier Maya's Refillables which we are excited to start. The third idea which is about to go to an all student vote is for RUSU to hold policy that states we support the global climate strikes.

Now, I wouldn't get through this talk without shouting about perhaps the biggest sustainability win of the year which has been to get the University to fully divest from fossil fuels. This journey started 5 years ago for RUSU and when I picked it up in the Summer we sent a letter to the VC demanding the University fully divest if they wanted to achieve their aspiration of becoming the greenest University in the world. When I first told Dan this was something I wanted to achieve, I think he probably had his doubts over the success of the campaign and sort of nervously wished me good luck. We had a petition running which had received over 700 signatures and students had come out to protest against the fossil fuel investments. Zeid Sharif, the Diversity Officer, was invited to sit on the panel to pick a new investments manager who would prioritise fossil fuel divestment. To hear the news last week was absolutely incredible, especially knowing that this is something students really wanted to see happen.

I hope this has given you some insight into the student interest of sustainability at the University of Reading. Students can often be seen in the community as nuisances so I hope I have provided you with some faith that there is a genuine care and constant growing concern to look after our community.