



Higher Education Sustainable Workplace Survey



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Executive Summary:

Unite Amicus Section conducted the following survey on attitudes to tackling the environment in the higher education sector.

Key Finding:

- 100% of respondents would support environmental measures being taken in their workplace
- 98% think that trade unions should be involved in designing and implementing measures that help improve the impact of workplaces on the environment
- 98% think their workplace wastes energy and resources
- 92% think that cost savings from environmental policies should be reinvested into the workplace to provide a cleaner and environmentally friendly workplace.
- 95% are interested in accessing new skills for themselves and members that allow them to build environmentally sustainable workplaces
- 24% of branches are already engaging with policies that attempt to reduce the environmental impact of their workplace
- 71% think that this work will help get new members involved with the union
- 71% think that this work will help to develop constructive relationships with management
- 63% would be interested in attending a trade union course on building sustainable workplaces
- 68% would like model environmental agreements
- 82% would like trade union workplace environmental guides

Introduction:

Sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs while keeping within the Earth's ability to supply resources and absorb waste." - United Nations definition

Climate change and the impact of human activity on the environment are increasingly recognised as some of the most pressing issues facing the world. There is growing understanding that tackling climate change requires a massive restructuring of the way society is organised and resources are used. Governments finally seem to be waking up to this and there is now a real opportunity to make lasting changes.

Without doubt one of the most significant areas for change is in the workplace. Workplaces are responsible for over half the UK and Republic of Ireland's energy usage. Improving the systems, infrastructure and practices used can make a major difference to the impact of the UK and Republic of Ireland on the environment.

Unite Amicus Section understands that the impact of not engaging with the sustainable workplaces agenda will be that employers will simply implement changes without consultation and with potentially damaging repercussions on working terms and conditions. Genuinely sustainable workplaces will need workplace practices that are designed in collaboration with and with the consent of those people working there.

With this in mind Unite Amicus Section conducted the following pilot survey to gauge the views of its workplace representatives in the higher education sector on the issue.

The results are clear to see. There is a substantial appetite for reps to tackle this issue and a strong desire for the union to provide training and resources to help them pursue this agenda.

Methodology and Sample

The survey questionnaire was sent via email to 341 Unite Amicus Section workplace representatives in the higher education sector. In total 65 Reps responded representing a response rate of 19% - a high return for this kind of survey.

These responses covered views from 41 higher education institutions in the UK and two in the Republic of Ireland (see Appendix A). The majority of those people responding defined themselves as workplace representatives (68%) with a small number of health and safety representatives, environmental representatives, branch secretaries and one branch treasurer. The responses reflected a good regional spread across the union's membership (see Appendix B).

What is a sustainable workplace?

"We use air-conditioning in winter to counter the heating (which can not be turned off)!"

The Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC) in the UK claims that "sustainability" is not something we put in a separate box marked "green". It is a core trade union and workplace issue. It directly impacts on jobs - in numbers, types, skills and locations. The employment and training implications of the transition to a low carbon economy are profound and the changes will need to be managed fairly - through the so-called "just transition".

Some key elements of a sustainable workplace are:

1. A joined up strategy for minimising impacts based on the integration of social, economic and environmental requirements

Many of the areas where workplaces waste resources are to do with poor management and coordination, short term and socially irresponsible decisions. Unite Amicus Section would argue for a systematic framework through which workplaces can be designed to minimise their negative impacts.

2. Worker participation and workplace democracy

As a trade union Unite Amicus Section knows that workplace decisions that are implemented without consultation or the consent of the workforce face hostility and have negative effects on health and productivity. The best way to tackle workplace issues is always through collective agreement and the participation of all concerned. In this way workplaces can develop common, empowering and consensual solutions to the problems that they face.

3. Justice within and between generations

A sustainable workplace is one that uses resources in such way that aims not to cause problems or limit the choices available to future generations. Those that will inherit the world are entitled to live in it just as much as we are.

4. Understanding of the relationship between local action and global impacts

In other words, "think global, act local." It is no longer possible to say that what we do locally has no impact abroad. The lifestyles that we lead and the resources we use and even the food we eat are often totally dependent on the work and lives of people on the other side of the world. The damage we do to the environment here in Ireland and the UK is having a disproportionate effect on those living in the poorest parts of the world. We must design our economy in a responsible way that takes the needs of those people into account too.

Environmental issues in the Higher Education Sector

A recent Higher Education Funding Council of England sponsored report showed that the Higher Education Sector rated as the lowest performer when compared to the UK's top private companies and industries on many environmental indicators. The research conducted by Business In The Community found that the HE sector scored an average of only 55% on the BITC environment index, compared to the business average of 83%.

This followed two UK government studies of the environmental performance of the sector (Toyne Report 1993 and Khan Review 1997) that revealed that the institutions had shown considerable "indifference" to the agenda.

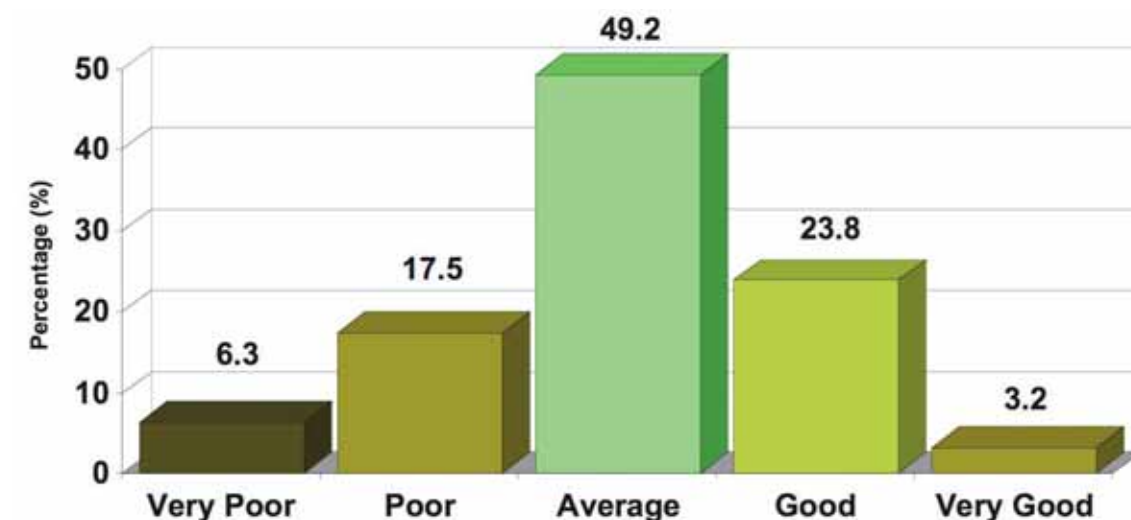
Impacts of Universities

The UK HE sector:

- spends £3 billion annually on goods and services
- has 2 million students and over 300,000 staff
- consumes energy equal to 3 million tonnes of CO2 released into the atmosphere every year
- owns 9% of all UK office space
- uses 16 million cubic metres of water annually
- is responsible for over 1 million journeys every day.

This survey shows that perceptions of Higher Education workplaces are mixed. For example, 98% of respondents think that their workplace wastes energy and resources. However, ratings of an institution's commitment to sustainable workplace represented a broad spread with just under half rating them as average (49%), 27% rating them good or very good and 24% rating them poor or very poor (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 : Institutional commitment to sustainable workplaces



Why should trade unions take action?

"It is an issue that is being talked about in many coffee bars and staff rooms and I think we should lead on this like we always do."

The survey results show a high level of support for taking action in the workplace on the environment. For example, 100% of respondents said that they would support environmental measures being taken in their workplace.

Similarly, 98% of those responding thought that trade unions should be involved in designing and implementing measures that help improve the impact of workplaces on the environment. The one respondent who disagreed with this statement did so through a belief that other issues should take priority rather than because of strong opposition in principle.

The level of support is similar to that found in a survey conducted by the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC)² and further highlights the desire for trade unions to make sure that this issue is tackled effectively and justly rather than imposed from above.

What are the benefits?

Tackling emissions and reducing the negative environmental impact of workplaces - or as one respondent put it "saving the planet" - are not the only potential benefits from engaging with this agenda.

Saving Money

Cutting waste and improving energy efficiencies can often save money. When asked where these savings should be used 92% thought that they should be reinvested into the workplace to provide a cleaner and environmentally friendly workplace suggesting that, for most, this was a priority. 44% thought that the savings should be retained by the organisation to assist in training and developing skills for those likely to be affected by a switch from carbon-reliant working to environmental cleaner skills. 41% thought that savings could be shared with everyone in the workplace as an incentive to make further savings, while only 16% thought they should be retained by the organisation for its own priorities.

New Members

71% of respondents thought this agenda would help get new members involved with the union and 58% thought it would help engage young people. It is important for the trade union movement's own sustainability and effectiveness to recruit new members and engage with the important issues of the time. This kind of work would also act as a good awareness opportunity for both environmental issues and the importance of trade unionism.

Pay, Terms and Conditions

Pay and terms are the bread and butter for trade unionists and it is significant to note that 53% of respondents thought that a cut in consumption costs could be used in pay bargaining later while another 34% thought it would improve job security. If trade unionists are involved in the design of and decisions behind workplace practices they will be in a much stronger position to negotiate where the benefits of cost savings are directed. It also gives them the ability to ensure that measures are introduced properly and treated sensitively rather than forced on people.

Partnership Working

71% thought this agenda would help develop constructive relationships with management with several seeing it as a good issue to take forward through their partnership working agenda. This was mirrored by the fact that 68% of respondents thought that management would be supportive or very supportive to trade unions working in this area. 28% thought that they would be neutral and only 7% thought that they would not be supportive (no one thought that they would be hostile).

Unite and the environment

"We have appointed a workplace representative to specialise in energy management and just elected a branch environmental officer who is working on initiatives to raise the profile with both staff and students on environmental impact culminating in a one day event on campus."

Unite Amicus Section workplace representatives in the Higher Education sector have already started to tackle this issue.

Just under a quarter of branches (24%) are already taking action to improve the environmental impact of their workplaces, while a further 32% of respondents did not know.

The branches that have engaged with the agenda seem to be taking a variety of actions. Of particular note are three branches that have appointed union environmental representatives (two of whom have responded to the survey). Several others have begun participating in environmental committees or in discussions with management over policies. These suggest a strategic approach to the issue and the development of a negotiating framework.

Other actions include pursuing recycling and energy conservations, cleaner transport plans such as bicycle purchasing schemes, car shares and incentives to use public transport, the disposal of electronic waste, effluence, heavy metals, cardboard paper and awareness raising.

This shows that Unite representatives are taking an active role in promoting these issues.

As with other union issues sustainable workplace practices require a systematic approach and an effective framework for negotiations. This would set up clear aims and objectives for change as well as structures for dialogue, consultation and negotiation that will help the union and employer make positive progress.

Support from the union

UK and Irish workers need to be equipped with the skills and resources to make their workplaces exemplars of good practice and efficiency in the 21st Century.

95% of respondents said they would be interested in accessing new skills for themselves and members that allow them to build environmentally sustainable workplaces.

Unite Amicus Section understands that for sustainable environmental practices to be successful in the workplace new skills and learning opportunities must be made available to support the transition.

² TUSDAC, Greening the workplace, June 2006

Delivering these skills currently rests with the employer and government however this survey shows that there is substantial interest for union participation on tackling the greening the workplace agenda. Unite Amicus Section believes that without a joint approach to skill development opportunities will be lost.

89% of respondents were interested in receiving more information on environmental workplace practices, 63% would be interested in attending a trade union course on building sustainable workplaces, 68% would like model environmental agreements, 82% would like trade union workplace environmental guides, 46% would like support carrying out an environmental audit, and 68% would like access to links and information.

In addition one respondent raised the issue that these practices also needed to be carried out by Unite itself as an organisation.

University policies and infrastructure

“As far as I know we have no policy but have been invited by the Energy and Environment manager to take part in his workplace initiatives”

Several reports and studies³ have isolated the factors necessary for a university to become effective in improving its environmental performance.

The general factors include:

- Active public support from senior management,
- Full time staff responsible
- Staff and student participation
- A written, publicly available environmental policy
- Comprehensive review to investigate the environmental impacts of the institution

The Unite Amicus Section survey illustrates that in some areas there is a lot of progress while on others there is still a very long way to go. For example 68% of respondents thought that management would be supportive or very supportive to trade unions working in this area.

In contrast the survey results show that many union representatives seem to be unaware of their university environmental policy and practices. For example, 46% did not know whether or not their institution had a publicly available environmental policy, 52% did not know whether any environmental audits had been carried out and 71% did not know whether audited information was publicly available. This all suggests that staff participation and awareness raising is currently not very high.

“There is probably more going on in The University than is reflected in the above answers I suppose I should check the website etc however I am personally committed to sustainability & we must do very much more. So count me in!”

Those that did know reported that 35% of institutions had a publicly available environmental policy while 10% reported that auditing information was public.

When asked about whether there were staff responsible for environmental performance, 30% reported that their institution had none at all, while 16% had an energy manager, 13% had

members of staff with part-time responsibility, 20% had full time staff members (one institution reporting three) and several others had these responsibilities tackled by committees.

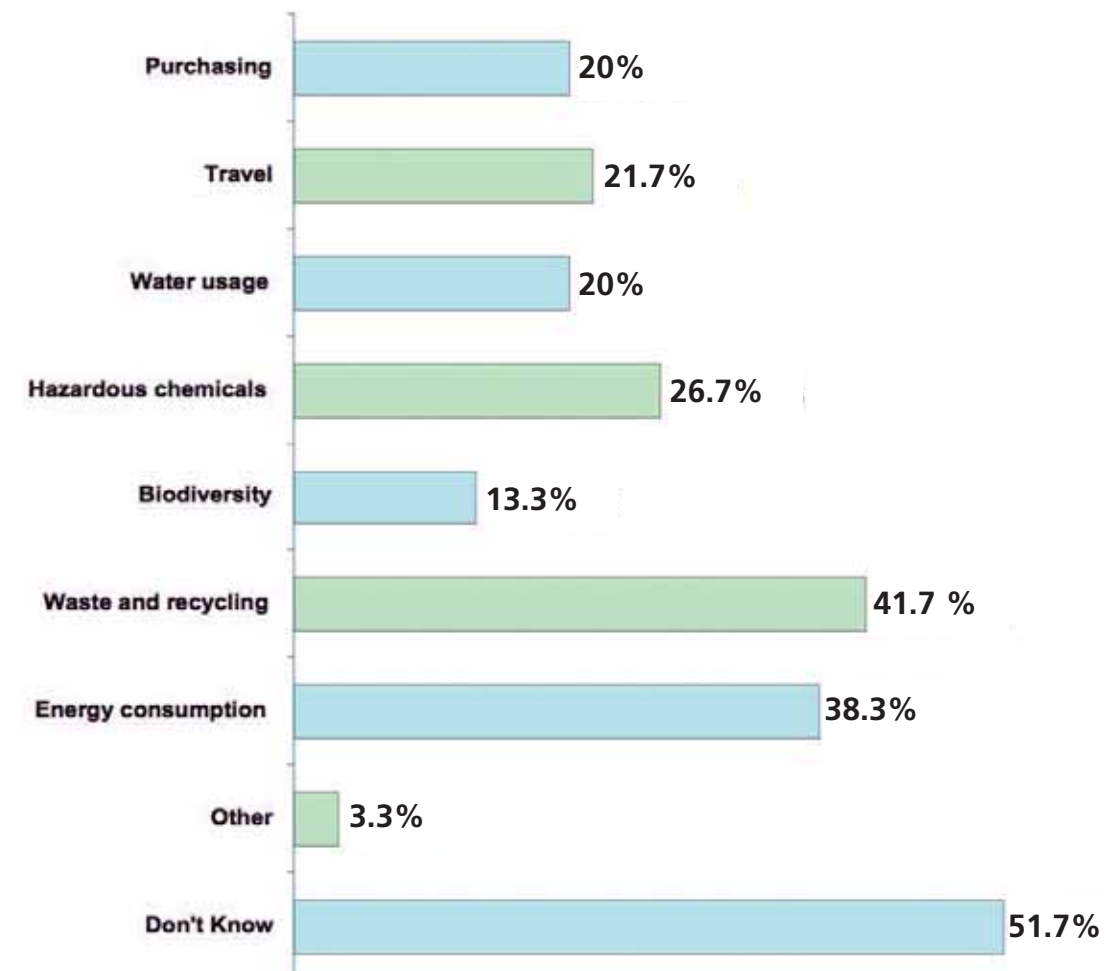
Unite Amicus Section would argue that for effective policy implementation these responsibilities should not just be tacked on to some one's other responsibilities but be given adequate time and resources.

The level of systems reviews varied between institutions. Some had comprehensively audited whilst others had done very little (see Figure 2 below). The most common audits were about waste and recycling. A third of respondents said that they had access to this information, again showing that staff are not being fully engaged in many institutions.

Lastly, it is clear that many institutions have started to look at recycling and environmental travel but much fewer have looked at making comprehensive systems and a framework through which the institution plans its environmental performance (see Figure 3).

As with other workplace issues such as health and safety, equalities and learning Unite knows that effective collective strategic planning is the best way to achieve the desired results.

Figure 2 : Has your institution conducted an environmental audit on the issues below?



³ Gareth Simkins - Going Green report 2004 (People & Planet)

Figure 3 : Has your institution attempted to implement any of the following workplace practices?

Workplace practice	Percentage
Recycling	69.5%
Promoting environmental travel options	47.5%
Energy efficient lighting and appliances	47.5%
Raising awareness	45.8%
Controlling paper use	33.9%
Upgrading or replacing inefficient plant	30.5%
A systematic utilities and building monitoring system (BMS)	30.5%
Systems for ensuring that heating and electrical equipment are only on at appropriate times	30.5%
Assessing major purchases according to their environmental impact	16.9%
Construction of a combined heat and power (CHP) plant	15.3%
A carbon reduction plan with time bound targets for continual emissions reductions	13.6%
Promoting biodiversity	13.6%
Microgeneration (e.g. installing wind turbines or solar panels on buildings)	13.6%
Don't know	13.6%
Other	6.8%

Conclusions

Unite Amicus Section believes that the Higher Education sector as a whole needs to better engage in the whole sustainability and environmental agenda.

Previous research suggests the sector itself is not fully signed up to a committed policy of change in either attitudes or actions on sustainability and the environment.

Unite Amicus Section research shows 100% of our reps surveyed support the need for environmental measures being taken yet HEFCE's own confirmed research shows that many higher education institutions are much less than 100% committed.

It is our view that the only way participation and delivery of a change in sustainability and environmental thinking will succeed is with the active participation of all stakeholders. Institutions, Government, ordinary trade union members and students need to be involved in the delivery of that change.

Without the engagement of trade union and student members, who in many cases can advise on the practicality of where best to make changes in workplace energy or infrastructure needs, any top down approach is likely to fail or fall far short of the real potential.

The importance of involving the workforce in the sustainability and environmental agenda needs to be better understood. There is a real sense of wishing to move the whole approach forward by our union representatives. Sadly our research shows that in many institutions there is no real institutional attempt to engage these key decision makers with the greening agenda or even to let them have a clear sense of what are the local aims and how they can be achieved.

Unite Amicus Section argues that a participative collective approach is the best model to achieve that.

Our survey also shows our representatives want any savings in energy costs to be ploughed back into the workplace to make further environmental changes or to retrain staff with the new skills needed to do it themselves.

Nationally within the higher education sector Unite believes that funding councils and the institutional employers need to begin to develop a fuller understanding of the issues within the higher education workforce. They need to help turn what is currently one of the most disengaged and "dirty" sectors into one of the most enlightened, sustainable and environmentally advanced in energy use, technology and carbon neutrality.

More funding is needed from both funding councils and the institutional employers to utilise the potential within the workforce. This could be done by first auditing current practices and then by collectively agreeing a positive way forward. An important way to start would be to recognise the new skills and training needs for a switch to low impact workplaces and more sustainable infrastructure and practices.

Based on the results of this survey Unite Amicus section will be aiming to start a dialogue on greening workplaces with the higher education employers association UCEA. At the same time we will also approach UK and Irish higher education funding providers whether at funding council or Government level about moving this agenda forward.

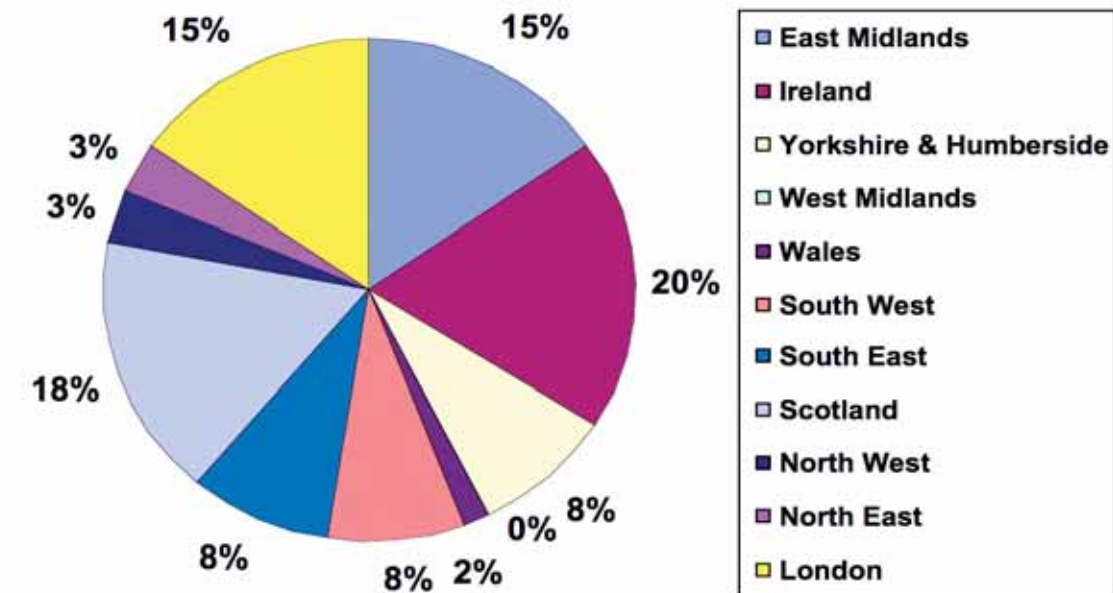
Unite will continue to do what it does best - lead the agenda!

Mike Robinson
National Officer Education Sector
Unite Amicus Section

Appendix A - Institutions covered

Aberdeen	Liverpool
Abertay, Dundee	Loughborough University
Bath	Maynooth
Bradford	Newcastle University
Bristol	Nottingham University
Brunel University	Queen Margaret University
Cambridge University	Queen's University Belfast
Canterbury Christ Church University	Royal College of Art
City University	Sheffield
Dundee	Southampton
Durham University	St. Andrews
Edinburgh College of Art	St George's University of London
Exeter	St Patrick's College, Dublin
GCU	Stirling
Hull	Strathclyde University
Imperial College London	Sussex
Kent	Swansea University
Kings College London	University College London
Lancaster	University of Ulster
Leeds	York
Leicester	Zoological Society of London

Appendix B - Regional Spread



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the Unite Amicus Section representatives in the Higher Education Sector who contributed to this survey.

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