

Briefing: The Union Should Support the Fossil Free Careers Campaign

January 2025

What is the current situation at UCL related to this proposal?

UCL Careers Service current Employer Engagement Policy states 'It is UCL Careers' policy to allow any graduate employer to attend careers events, provided they are offering legally compliant opportunities, that would not bring UCL into disrepute.'¹ Their policy also goes on to say 'We urge students to make their own well-informed decisions about identifying career paths that align with their values, skills, and interests.' The Employer Engagement Policy also includes a section highlighting 'Student Right to Protest' and includes the wording 'We respect students' right to protest and allow them to do as long as it is within reasonable levels of disruption to others. UCL Careers are a member of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) and abide by their code of ethics²; including their expanded position on impartiality.³

206 individuals have signed a petition calling for UCL careers departments to refuse new relationships with oil, gas, or mining companies, decline to renew any current relationships with oil, gas or mining companies after the contractually obligated period ends and to adopt a publicly available Ethical Careers Policy that explicitly excludes oil, gas and mining companies from recruitment opportunities.⁴ The petition was started on 30 August 2022 and the last signature was obtained 10 months ago. As the petition is hosted on People and Planet, there is no guarantee that every signature is from a UCL student.

The demands of the petition highlighted in the paragraph above were discussed at Education Zone (EZ2303) in the previous academic year on 30 January 2024. The full policy proposal, briefing and a response from the Careers Service were included in the meeting papers.⁵ As indicated by the minutes on Page 5, this proposal was taken to a vote with 41% of members voting for and 45% of members voting against;⁶ as a result, the policy proposal did not pass.

In 2019, UCL launched its new Sustainability Strategy,⁷ including a commitment to divest from fossil fuels.⁸ UCL's Sustainability Strategy expired in 2024. In February 2024, UCL joined a coalition of universities advocating for more sustainable investment options.⁹

¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/about-us/who-we-work/employer-engagement-policy>

² <https://www.agcas.org.uk/AGCAS-Member-Code-of-Ethics>

³ <https://www.agcas.org.uk/AGCAS-position-and-impartiality-and-the-promotion-of-particular-employers-and-industry-sectors>

⁴ <https://peopleandplanet.org/petitions/fossil-free-careers/fossil-free-careers-ucl>

⁵ <https://studentsunionucl.org/papers-for-education-zone-ez2303>

⁶ https://studentsunionucl.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/EZ2303%20Minutes_0.pdf

⁷ https://www.ucl.ac.uk/sustainable/sites/sustainable/files/change_possible._the_strategy_for_a_sustainable_ucl_2019-2024.pdf

⁸ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2019/oct/ucl-divests-fossil-fuels-it-launches-bold-new-sustainability-strategy>

⁹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/feb/ucl-joins-coalition-universities-pushing-more-sustainable-investment-options>

What would change if the policy was successful?

As outlined by the proposal, the policy includes three actions:

- Publicly Support the FFC campaign (this most likely refers to the People and Planet campaign,¹⁰ which has the same objectives as the petition circulated in August 2022.
- Lobby UCL Management.
- Collaborate with the Careers Department to Promote Green Job opportunities.

If this policy were to pass and be implemented, the job opportunities advertised to students by Careers are likely to change. Students could still seek out these opportunities independently.

UCL Careers Service may also have to revisit their relationship with AGCAS. Although three AGCAS members have made a Fossil Free Careers commitment – University of Bedfordshire, Wrexham Glyndwr University and the University of the Arts London.¹¹

What is the relevant national context to this situation?

People and Planet have produced a 'mythbusting resource' counteracting UCL's Employer Engagement Policy.¹² The resource focuses on five key areas:

- Impartiality of Careers Services.
- Membership to and relationship with AGCAS.
- The value of a policy rather than sustainability statements from fossil fuel companies.
- The role of green careers fairs.
- Student demand.

People and Planet have also produced a list of Universities which have demonstrated a commitment to pursuing fossil fuel divestments, which includes 116 UK Universities.¹³ As well as this, there are nine UK Universities with a dedicated commitment to Fossil Free Careers.¹⁴ Support for a Fossil Free Careers policy also has support from NUS¹⁵ and UCU.¹⁶

Are there any legal implications to this policy proposal?

The Union would only be able to publicise future petitions from the campaign group if they are linked to issues directly affecting 'students as students' as part of their charitable purpose.

Should the policy pass, the Union would adopt a policy position to ask the Careers Service to adopt a fossil free careers stance. If they were to do so it will not have an impact upon the legal framework which the Careers Service operate within. The Careers Service could continue to work with fossil fuel companies if they are within the law.

¹⁰ <https://peopleandplanet.org/fossil-free-careers>

¹¹ <https://peopleandplanet.org/resources/fossil-free-careers-mythbusting>

¹² <https://peopleandplanet.org/resources/fossil-free-careers-mythbusting>

¹³ <https://peopleandplanet.org/fossil-free/fossil-free-victories>

¹⁴ <https://peopleandplanet.org/fossil-free-careers/victories>

¹⁵ <https://peopleandplanet.org/fossil-free/fossil-free-declaration>

¹⁶ <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/12829/UCU-motion-backs-Fossil-Free-Careers-campaign>

Does this relate to any existing SU policy?

No.

Are there any financial, resource or stakeholder / public relations issue with this policy proposal?

This policy could create media coverage, both positive and negative, but it could also be highlighted as an example of a 'no platform' style policy limiting freedom of choice for students.

Within certain industries, such as Engineering, there could be a negative perception about how UCL students are perceived by fossil fuel companies. Those companies may choose to offer internships and graduate opportunities to students from Universities they are partnered with. Conversely green energy companies may perceive UCL Engineering graduates positively for the opposite reasons.

Are there any sustainable implications to this policy proposal?

Yes. It would encourage more sustainable career choices for UCL graduates.

Are there any equity and inclusion implications to this policy proposal?

Not directly. However, it could impact the number of jobs advertised to our students. This may have an adverse impact upon our students who do not have links or connections within their desired industry and a more reliant on opportunities being advertised by the Careers Service.

What would the next steps be if the proposal passed?

The Union would publicly support the Fossil Free Careers campaign, most likely by utilising our student leaders to release a statement following the passing of the proposal.

The Sabbatical Officers would lobby UCL Management in order to support the proposal and work with the Careers Service to promote green job opportunities.