

Discussion Briefing – UCL Engineering Careers Team Oil Company Deal

Education Zone, November 2022

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

Currently, UCL's career service promotes opportunities within the fossil fuel industry.

According to UCL's 'Strategy for a Sustainable UCL 2019-2024', there are three founding principles: 1) committing to empower every student to champion sustainability during their time at UCL, and beyond; 2) leading by example through making operating in a sustainable and socially responsible way the new normal by fully integrating it into their planning, processes, and culture; 3) shaping the debate and co-creating sustainability solutions in the wider world.¹

In October 2021, UCL's President and Provost, Michael Spence joined leading universities from around the world in making the U7+ university climate pledge. The U7+ Alliance is the first international coalition of university presidents. It is aimed at structuring and advancing the role of universities as global actors. Alliance members meet annually to establish a common agenda and identify key areas for coordinated action. Regarding the pledge, Spence said, "We recognise the devastating impact that climate change can have on the most vulnerable communities. Through UCL's long-term sustainability plans, Generation One campaign and our work with fellow U7+ members we are proud to be empowering the next generation of brave thinkers to take action now."²

According to People & Planet (the largest student network in the UK campaigning for social and environmental justice), UCL is considered a "1st class" university. In their 2021/2022 independent league table of UK universities ranked by environmental and ethical performance, UCL came 19th out of 154, and was awarded a '1st Class Award' by the group.³

What is the relevant national/ international context to this situation?

In August 2021, the sixth assessment report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was published.⁴ The report, which concluded that there is "unequivocal" evidence that human actions are changing our climate, was commissioned by 195 governments and all of them signed off on the conclusions. As UCL's Professor Simon Lewis highlights, "The burning of fossil fuels and deforestation has led to levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that are higher today than at any time in the past 2 million years. Alongside methane and other greenhouse gases, this has driven Earth to be warmer than at any point in the past 125,000 years. The impacts of this can be seen in the loss of Arctic Sea ice, accelerating sea level rise, hotter and more frequent heatwaves, increased and more frequent extreme rainfall events and, in some regions, more intense droughts and fires."⁵

As of September 2022, Birkbeck, University of London became the first HE institution in the UK to end fossil fuel industry recruitment on campus.⁶ Their careers service has now introduced an 'Ethical Careers Policy' which explicitly excludes

¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/sustainable/sustainability-ucl/change-possible-strategy-sustainable-ucl-2019-2024>

² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/oct/ucl-joins-u7-university-climate-pledge>

³ <https://peopleandplanet.org/university-league>

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-i/>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/10/fossil-fuel-companies-ipcc-climate-report-governments>

⁶ <https://wonkhe.com/blogs-sus/campaigning-for-careers-to-go-fossil-free/>

fossil fuel recruiters from holding recruitment events, promoting roles to students, and advertising or sponsorship opportunities. WonkHE believe that this creates an important precedent for climate action in HE.

Further to this, in June 2022 the University and College Union (UCU) national congress had a Fossil Free Careers motion voted through by delegates. The motion supported careers services “declining to promote oil, gas and mining companies”.⁷ This means that UCU will also be supporting the campaign for fossil free careers services.

Are there any legal implications to this item for discussion?

N/A

Does this relate to any existing SU policy?

N/A

Are there any financial, resource or stakeholder/ public relations issues with this item for discussion?

N/A

Are there any sustainability implications to this item for discussion?

Yes. This policy seeks to bring UCL in line with their own sustainable UCL strategy whereby they are aiming to lead by example through making operating in a sustainable and socially responsible way the new normal by fully integrating it into their culture (see footnote 1).

Are there any equity and inclusion implications to this item for discussion?

N/A

What would the next steps?

⁷ <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/12299/Recruitment-and-campaigning-motions#63-careers-services-informing-students-and-supporting-the-low-carbon-economy>