

Climate Students Sweden's action paper for higher education institutions

Introduction

To help higher education institutions (HEI) with concrete solutions for halving their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by the end of 2022, and reach zero GHG emissions by 2030, Climate Students Sweden started the campaign #IdeasForAction in March 2020. In total 99 students' ideas were collected during March and April from around 15 HEIs in Sweden and Denmark. From these ideas, brilliant solutions were generated during May 2020 and are presented in this action paper.

With this action paper we hope to contribute to a constructive dialogue with HEIs that focuses on the solutions rather than the obstacles. Let us cooperate and help each other make HEIs the leading example in society. We, the students, want to be proud of our HEIs and we want to help them be more appealing to the Greta Thunberg generation.

Our meetings with Matilda Ernkrans, Minister for Higher Education and Research have contributed to a change in the government's appropriation letter for HEIs. The appropriation direction now requires HEIs to reduce their own GHG emissions. Also, 37 HEIs have adopted a climate framework. These are important steps. Still, we have not seen any HEI practice what they teach and truly adapt to climate science and the Paris Agreements' 1.5 degree target. This action paper is one of our contributions to impact HEIs to save our future.

Climate Students Sweden

Climate leadership

HEIs have a unique role as climate science producers and facilitators of climate crisis solutions. Therefore HEIs must lead by example to help save our future.

Management

1. Set up the science based target to halve the HEIs' emissions by the end of 2022, and have zero emissions by 2030, in line with climate science and the Paris Agreement.
2. Adopt a carbon budget and action plans to halve the HEIs' emissions by the end of 2022.
3. Have a mandatory climate day for all students and employees every month for developing visions, goals, action plans and innovations, and for sharing good examples, for rapid emission reduction.
4. Implement "Green office" with student employees that informs, connects and supports students and staff to act on sustainability (www.greenofficemovement.org).
5. Collaborate with Climate Students and openly support us.
6. Make demands on HEI:s suppliers to have goals in line with the current climate science.

Measurement and ranking

7. Create measurement and reporting standards which facilitate the collection of data about GHG emissions from all areas of the HEIs, including e.g. investments, travelling, consumption, waste and suppliers.
8. Create guidance on what to measure and how to facilitate the collection of data in a form where it can be disaggregated, and compared over time and institutions.
9. Have a committee that works in a transparent process with an annual national rank report on HEIs' emissions.
10. Calculate your ecological footprint and conduct life cycle assessment of sustainable solutions.

Investments and sponsorships

11. Do not invest in industries based on fossil fuels and emission-heavy sectors e.g. coal, oil, gas, mining, air travel, fast fashion, cement etc.

12. Adopt an ethical investment policy that follows the principles for responsible investment laid out by the The UN Principles for Responsible Investment.
13. Be transparent and conscious about the HEIs' investments.
14. Commit openly to divestment.
15. Sell what investments in fossil fuels you already got.
16. Demand reduction of climate emissions at the annual shareholder meetings.
17. Invest in sustainable, climate smart companies e.g green bonds, renewable energy, plant-based products etc.
18. Only accept external funding from sponsors whose work is in line with climate science e.g. funding for research, work fairs or other events.

Education and research

HEIs must equip all students and employees with core climate crisis knowledge. It concerns everyone in all fields and it will have an impact on all aspects of the future.

Education for teachers/lecturers

19. Provide mandatory education for teachers/lecturers in the complexity of the climate crisis when it comes to equity and NET, for e.g. a digital crash course.
20. Provide pedagogical tools to teachers and lecturers for their courses and lectures about the climate crisis.

Education for students

21. Have a mandatory transdisciplinary climate crisis course for all program-students from different disciplines, with projects about solving local sustainability problems.
22. Encourage teachers from different faculties to cooperate and cross borders in their formation of the climate crisis course.
23. Offer more transdisciplinary education and freestanding courses about the climate crisis and sustainability problems and solutions.
24. Integrate the climate crisis and sustainability into all existing courses.

25. Evaluate all existing courses at the HEIs to make sure that they are not encouraging climate-damaging and unsustainable behaviours or actions.
26. Make it easier to have the possibility to choose a sustainability-related course as one of the electives included in the program.
27. All exams should be offered and encouraged to be written digitally in programs such as Digiexam.

Research

28. Cooperate with relevant actors in society through action research and knowledge sharing.
29. Sustainability should be a core principle in the ethics committee when deciding whether a research project can be done or not.
30. Increase green research within all disciplines.
31. Stop all research that focuses on further extraction and use of fossil fuels.

Travel

Amongst all agencies, HEIs are the worst emitters because of the flying culture. Scientists flying like the crisis does not exist is the wrong signal to our society.

Aviation travel

32. Ban aviation travelling when there are alternatives like train travelling and online education and meetings.
33. Ban all the domestic aviation travelling.
34. Generate discussions between Climate Students and the responsible staff on this topic to encourage science based goals and rules around flying.
35. Prohibit researchers from spending their remaining research-money on “fun” aviation travelling to conferences in “exotic” far away places or any places.
36. Stop flying in opponents and examining committees during disputations – they can participate online instead.

37. Map out and evaluate all HEIs' conferences and meetings and turn all digitally when possible.
38. Practice digital meetings or participate in digital conferences in all HEIs' courses so students and scientists learn how to use such technical tools.

Train travel

39. Make train travel the standard option when faculty enters the booking site and give faculty incentives to go by train.
40. Support train-booking and the sharing of inspiring experiences about train travelling.
41. Arrange train travel for exchange studies, and subsidies so train tickets correspond to flight tickets in price level.
42. Avoid placing students on satellite campuses if that means an increased need for travel.

Car travel

43. Make sure, with nudge and incentives, that employees choose public transports or electric private transports instead of going with taxis.
44. Set up fees for all car parks to discourage unnecessary travel by car and have application for parking passes for those who must go by fossil car.
45. Have discounts on the parking fee for electric cars.
46. Offer leasing contracts of electric cars to employees who must go by car to work.
47. Reduce the number of parking spots on campus to discourage fossil car travel.
48. Facilitate public transport by collaborating with public transport companies to make employees and students choose public transports.

Energy and material use

An efficient use of resources is crucial to minimizing an institution's carbon footprint. HEIs should step up and reduce their use of energy and materials.

Energy use

49. Reduce unnecessary electricity usage by turning off lights at night, use movement sensors and turn off digital screens outside of class hours.
50. Rearrange furniture to use as much sunlight as possible.
51. Switch from fossil fuel energy to clean renewable energy (solar, wind, hydro).
52. Install solar panels on the roof tops and a big meter in the building showing the amount of watts produced.
53. Consider using eco-friendly lamps for e.g. with micro-algae that produce light and absorb CO₂ from the air or other innovative alternatives.

Material use

54. Only build climate friendly buildings without concrete and asphalt, use sustainable materials like wood, stone and other renewable and low carbon options.
55. Make sure not to use single used-plastic or other unnecessary packages.
56. Create more green spaces on campus that will sequester CO₂ as well as contribute to students being more in touch with nature.
57. Be cautious of buying new things, use technology and other things longer and do not throw away things that work.
58. Buy and use upcycle waste products and hardware with replaceable parts.
59. Reuse furniture instead of throwing them away.
60. Have a furniture exchange service between old and new students.
61. Have an open repair space where students can come and repair their bicycles, shoes, clothes, furniture etc.

Food system

HEIs have a big opportunity to become pioneers in developing community food systems with sustainable, circular, and resilient food production and consumption.

Food production

62. Use land, parks, lawns, and other open areas for small-scale food production like kitchen gardens for vegetables and agroforestry for fruits, berries, and nuts.

63. Start courses about small-scale food production with both theory and practice integrated with the campuses' food production, and make spaces where students can grow their own food.
64. Map the available and needed resources for food production and hire professional gardeners for both the production and courses.
65. Have meadow-like greenspaces with food for pollinators instead of grass lawns.

Plant-based local food

66. Make plant-based (climate friendly and organic food) the only alternative, or at least the norm, at all meetings, events, activities, restaurants, and cafés.
67. Start a plant-based food week or month challenge where HEIs encourages all its employees and students to eat plant-based.
68. Promote plant-based food and zero food waste with posters in lunch-rooms.
69. Buy food directly from local ecological producers and demand the restaurants and cafés to do it.
70. Invite local small-scale producers and vegetarian/vegan influencers to speak at courses and lunch seminars.

Zero food waste

71. Implement a weight-system in restaurants and cafés where you pay for what you take.
72. Make new food out of the leftovers and collaborate with producers that use leftovers.
73. Give out or sell leftovers to students, apps such as Karma, Olio or organisations.
74. Make it easier or cheaper to bring your own cup when buying coffee.