

Barnsley College – Catalysing Carbon Literacy

Before Carbon Literacy

Prior to Carbon Literacy training sweeping through Barnsley College, there was already a 'green culture'. The College had already begun teaching about sustainability and climate change during select subject lessons, as well as encouraging learners to take action through assignments and project-based learning. The College also built a 'Think Low Carbon Centre' in 2014, designed to enhance learning on vocational subjects whilst also engaging the community, demonstrating several low carbon technologies such as solar panels, a biomass boiler, air source heat pumps, natural insulation and more. Whilst all this was taking place, it was coordinated by a few passionate changemakers. Introducing staff Carbon Literacy training via the Sustainability Strategy, launched in 2022, was a key turning point in making low-carbon and sustainable action mainstream. The decision to include it in the strategy was to ensure that staff were equipped with the tools and confidence to support the goals within the strategy.



During

To begin the aim of training all full-time staff at Barnsley College, members from each department were selected as 'Carbon Literacy Ambassadors' and took part in a 'Teach Carbon Literacy' course delivered by Manchester Metropolitan University. During a staff training week, a day was reserved for Carbon Literacy training, whereby all staff that were in on that day received training from the Carbon Literacy Ambassadors and were invited to apply for Carbon Literate certification. It became quickly evident that academic staff had the appetite to deliver this to students. Therefore, many of them pledged to cascade the training to their learners, thus becoming Carbon Literate Facilitators and upskilling their learners. Financially, this wasn't budgeted for. The College's Executive Team, recognising the rapid nature of the training and the spark it ignited in staff, agreed to fund certification for as many learners that wanted to take part in the training during Carbon Literacy Action Day (CLAD) 2023.

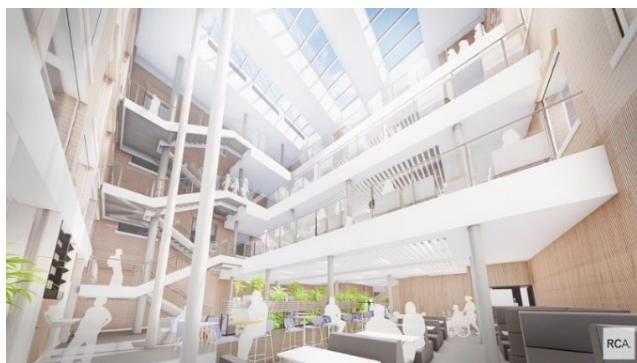
As a result, over 800 learners were trained and approximately 700 certified during CLAD 2023. Support departments also took catalytic action from the training. For example, the Student Recruitment team found an opportunity to explore their spheres of influence and created a Teams page for sharing office furniture, rather than buying new. This reinforced the 'green culture' that already existed but shared the co-benefits of refuse/reuse rather than recycle. Whilst the initial finances were a challenge to overcome, the savings from actions such as the Free Office Supplies group have made it worthwhile.



After

Since implementing Carbon Literacy training widely throughout the organisation in 2023, a low-carbon culture has become part of Barnsley College's identity. Whilst we're proud of the 1980 staff and students achieving Carbon Literate status, and the 5833kg of CO₂e saved from sharing office furniture and supplies, the culture shift has been the biggest achievement to date. Barnsley has the highest rates of 'green-scepticism' in the country^[1] and yet our College community continue to take inclusive low-carbon action. Our Executive Team stand proud of the achievements the College have collectively contributed to. When asked, 'why?', the response is almost always that *'it's the right thing to do'*.

The plans for the future are already in motion. We aim to decarbonise all of our buildings, with the retrofit of an existing building being turned into a Clean Energy Centre; transforming our 92-year-old University Centre, once the Mining and Technical College, into a modern, low-carbon Institute of Technology^[2]; and supporting our students to become Carbon Literacy Trainers to, hopefully, return to Barnsley to train the community when they graduate.



[1] <https://unherd.com/newsroom/revealed-britains-most-green-sceptic-towns/>

[2] <https://www.barnsley.ac.uk/transformation-of-historic-barnsley-college-campus-takes-shape>