November 2025

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Research for the Common Good

How are we responding to headwinds on global climate action?

Professor Mette Morsing, Director, Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment & Interim Dean, Saïd Business School

Dr Anupama Sen, Associate Director (Impact) & Head of Policy Engagement, Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

SMITH SCHOOL OF ENTERPRISE & ENVIRONMENT

Content

1. Vision
2. Programmes
3. The Challenge: Headwinds on global climate action
4. How we are responding:
    - *Research*
    - *Impact & engagement*
    - *Education*

Oxford Smith School: Our Impact Philosophy

Research to drive the green transition – transforming economies and governance to make people and nature thrive together

The Smith School of Enterprise and Environment at the University of Oxford was founded in 2008 by the philanthropy of Sir Martin Smith. With a global, multi-disciplinary faculty of scholars and practitioners and a core team, we are one of the University's leading centres for climate and nature. The Oxford Smith School delivers research to support businesses and governments adopt sustainable models without compromising economic growth, while redefining what growth means. We achieve real-world impact through research and teaching at the intersection of business, policy, economics, and sustainability.

Our Impact Philosophy

- Collaborating with governments, businesses, financial institutions, international organizations
- Providing policy-relevant research on environmental challenges, opportunities and solutions
- Working across economics, law, biology, energy, finance, development studies, geography, engineering, anthropology, behavioural science, physics, engineering, among other studies
- Teaching and training future leaders in sustainable business, finance, environmental law and policy
- Using our convening power to provide a trusted space for collaboration and action across sectorial and political divides

"We are set apart by our collective entrepreneurial spirit and drive for real world impact based on world-class research. The world must accelerate the green transition from as many angles as possible, and our research programmes are chosen as the best levers to drive the needed global transformation. Our work has already shaped global understanding of sustainability, and our aim is nothing less than global systems transformation."

Professor Mette Morsing, Director of Oxford Smith School of Enterprise and Environment

Research | **Education** | **Impact**

Vision

Transforming economies and governance to ensure people and nature thrive together

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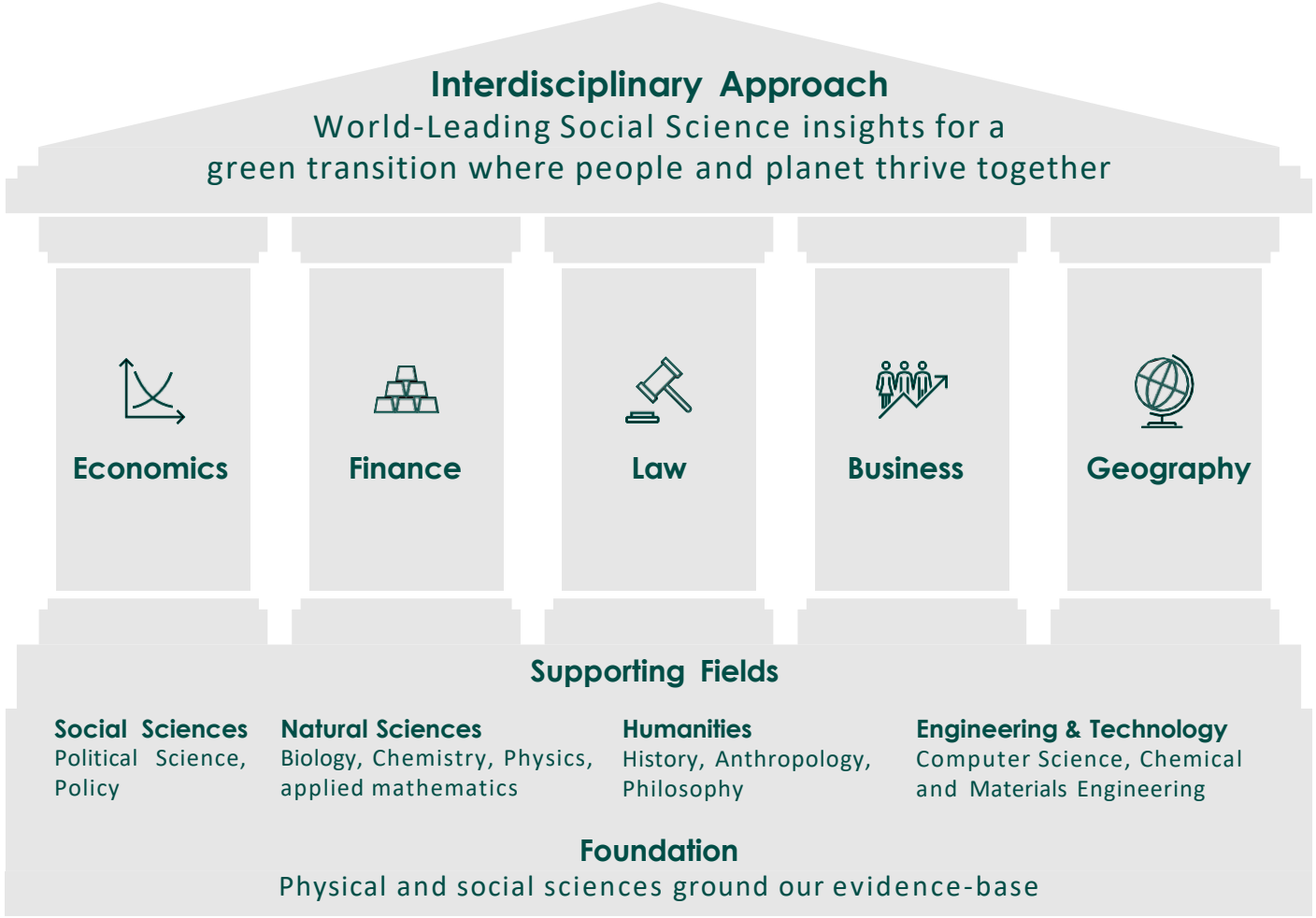
Approach



Interdisciplinary Approach

Based on a foundation of physical and social sciences, the School centers on five core disciplines complemented by a diverse set of supporting fields

Research Themes

We use our interdisciplinary approach to address nine key research themes across the Smith School:

- Climate Science
- Nature and Biodiversity
- Energy
- Food
- Water
- Sustainable Economy & Innovation
- Finance
- Law

Some of our research programmes and Principal Investigators

Professor Mette Morsing
Director of the Oxford Smith School, expert in corporate sustainability, leadership, and governance

Nature-Based Solutions Initiative

Professor Nathalie Seddon
Professor of Biodiversity
Founding Director of the Nature-based Solutions Initiative

Regenerative Economy

Dr Caitlin McElroy
Departmental Research Lecturer, Enterprise and the Environment and Programme Director, Executive Education

Economics of Sustainability

Professor Cameron Hepburn
Battcock Professor of Environmental Economics

Complexity Economics

Professor Doyne Farmer
Baillie Gifford Professor of Complex Systems Science

Future of Cooling

Dr Radhika Khosla
Asc Prof, Research Director of the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development

Oxford Net Zero and CO_2RE

Dr Steve Smith
Asc Prof, Executive Director of Oxford Net Zero and CO_2RE (UK's national carbon dioxide removal research hub)

Sustainable Finance Group

Dr Ben Caldecott
Director of Oxford Sustainable Finance Group, Lombard Odier Associate Professor of Sustainable Finance

Future of Food Programme

Dr Mike Clark
Asc Prof, Sustainable Food Solutions
Joint appointment with Biology

REACH Water Programme

Professor Rob Hope
Professor of Water Policy, Director of REACH

Climate Compatible Growth

Professor Sam Fankhauser
Professor of Climate Change Economics and Policy

Dr Alex Money
Director, Innovative Infrastructure Investment Programme

Sustainable Law Programme

Dr Thom Wetzer
Director, Oxford Sustainable Law Programme

Dr Ben Franta
Asc Prof, Climate Litigation Lab

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We are facing headwinds on global climate action

Headwinds

- Backtracking on environmental policies
- Biggest emitters (US, India, China) failing to attend COP
- Tariffs as a threat to international trade order/rules
- Misinformation around clean energy costs

Solutions

- The co-benefits of climate action
- Better understanding of behavioural incentives
- Synergy between climate action and future savings (lower cost of living)
- The prohibitive costs of climate *inaction*

False Flags? *Despite the negativity, 60% of British people support net zero (YouGov, 11 November 2025). Oxford (INET) research shows that policymakers consistently and vastly underestimate public support for climate action.*

Image created using Generative AI.

Common claims vs. what the science tells us....

COMMON CLAIM	What the Science/Evidence tells us
"Climate policies are too expensive and hurt the economy."	The economic costs of *inaction* are far higher. Studies (IPCC, IEA, IMF) consistently show that emissions cuts and clean energy investment generate long-term economic benefits and reduce climate-related losses.
"Renewables are unreliable; we need fossil fuels for stable energy."	Modern grids with diverse renewables, storage, and demand management can be highly reliable. Many regions already operate with high renewable shares (e.g., >50–80%) without compromising stability.
"Climate change is exaggerated or uncertain."	There is overwhelming scientific agreement that climate change is real, human-caused, and accelerating. Uncertainty is mostly about *how bad* the impacts will be, not whether they are happening.
"Fossil fuels are necessary for economic growth."	Economic growth has already been decoupled from fossil fuel use in many countries. Clean energy is now cheaper than new fossil-fuel generation in most of the world.
"Climate policy will raise energy prices."	While some policies can temporarily increase prices, renewable energy reduces costs over time. Solar and wind are now the cheapest sources of new power. Fossil fuels remain volatile and often more expensive.
"Other countries (e.g., China, India) pollute more, so our action doesn't matter."	Climate change is cumulative. Every country's emissions contribute to warming. Moreover, China and India are rapidly expanding renewables and have per-capita emissions far lower than many Western countries. Global action is required from everyone.
"We should focus on adaptation instead of cutting emissions."	Adaptation is necessary but cannot replace mitigation. Without emissions cuts, adaptation costs become unmanageable and many impacts (extreme heat, sea level rise) exceed human ability to adapt.
"Technology will solve the problem later; we shouldn't rush."	Future technologies (like direct air capture) may help, but cannot replace immediate emissions reductions. Delaying action increases costs and locks in long-lasting warming.
"Environmental regulations kill jobs."	Clean energy sectors create jobs. Job declines in fossil industries should be managed with strong transition, skilling, and re-skilling policies.

**Table created using Generative AI.*

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How we are responding - Research

- **REACH Water Programme:** From 2015-25, improved water security for 10mn people in 16 countries across Africa and Asia through community co-led investments in water services and policy.
- **Nature-Based Solutions Initiative:** has led to a rise in consideration of nature in science, policy, and practice, and helped enshrine nature-based solutions in UNFCCC and Paris Agreement pledges as well as business agendas.
- **Carbon removals:** works across scaling new technologies and practices alongside policy, and houses 3 world-leading removals initiatives: The State of Carbon Dioxide Removal research consortium convening over 50 leading scholars of removals, CO2RE as the UK's leading greenhouse gas removal hub connecting innovators, demonstrator projects and policy interventions, and leading academics of the cross-University Oxford Net Zero initiative.
- **Future of Cooling:** Over 200 million people are likely be displaced by extreme heat by 2050. Putting human wellbeing at the centre, the Programme develops solutions across urban design and architecture, infrastructure, energy consumption, and innovation in cooling chemicals that can save billions of tonnes of CO2 emissions and thousands of lives per year.
- **Sustainable Law:** the *Climate Policy Hub*; the *Science and the Law* programme producing peer-reviewed scientific research to inform legal actions addressing climate change; the *Climate Litigation Lab* developing new tools to enable legal actions addressing climate damage, disinformation and greenwashing.
- **Sustainable Finance:** The programme's groundbreaking work has led to the adoption of climate-related financial risk principles. This significantly changed the supervision of financial firms and investors in the UK and helped catalyse a global movement on climate change across financial institutions and financial supervision on disclosure of climate-related risks.
- **Sustainable Food Solutions:** works on solutions that cut across climate, biodiversity, and human wellbeing. Engages the entire food system including production systems, financial and corporate structures, consumption habits, and the role of business, policy, and finance.
- **Economics of the Renewable Energy Transition:** Completely replacing fossil fuels with clean energy by 2050 will save us trillions. Researchers analysed thousands of transition cost scenarios produced by major energy models, and used data on 45 years of solar energy costs, 37 years of wind energy costs and 25 years for battery storage.

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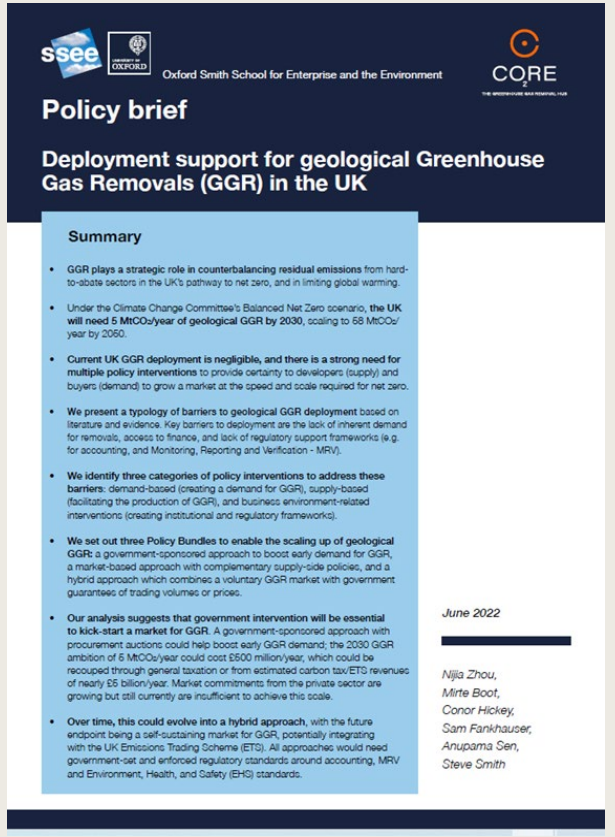
Some formats that we use for translating impact

New numbers based on published research/ proven methods

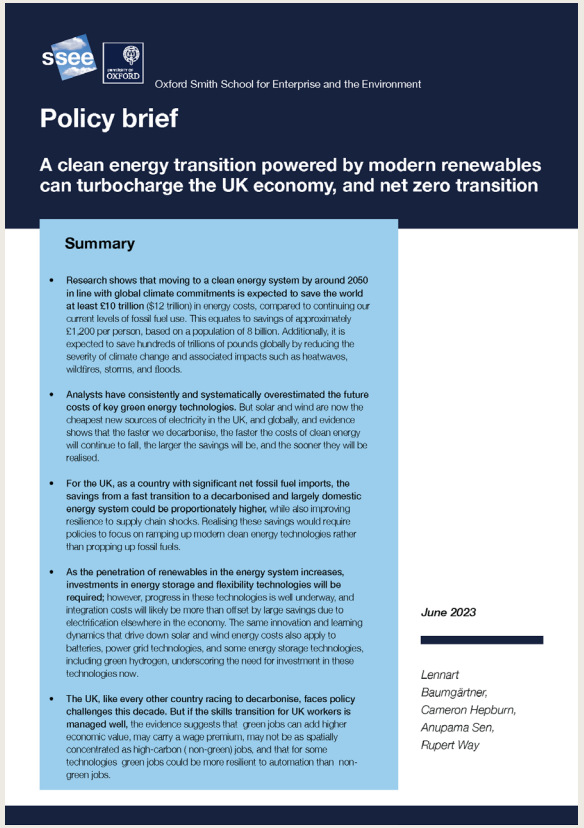
Source: Rapid Analysis - Russian Gas

Source: Rapid Analysis - Tripling Renewables

Briefs of key actionable conclusions from research expertise or publications



Source: Policy Brief - GGR



Source: Policy Brief – renewable costs

Supply-led example: Future of Cooling

I. Shaping the Narrative

- Connecting Future of Cooling Programme's findings with ongoing public policy debate on extreme heat
- G20 policy brief, COP26 webinar series, WEF articles
- Coverage in online, print and TV media based on research publications

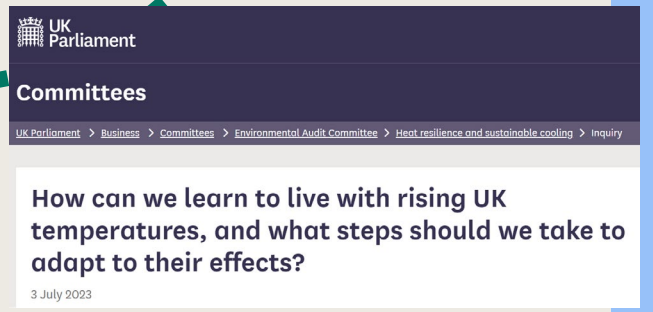
Policy change

II. Providing data or tools

- Publishing research articles
- Developing library of Cooling solutions
- Systems mapping
- Developing online course on sustainable cooling for decision makers
- UNEP Gap Report and Cities Handbook; IPCC 6th Assessment Report.

III. Responding to Enquiries

- UK Parliament briefing – POST Note on cooling
- Responding to UK Parliament Environmental Audit Committee call for new topics for enquiry – proposing Heat Resilience and Sustainable Cooling



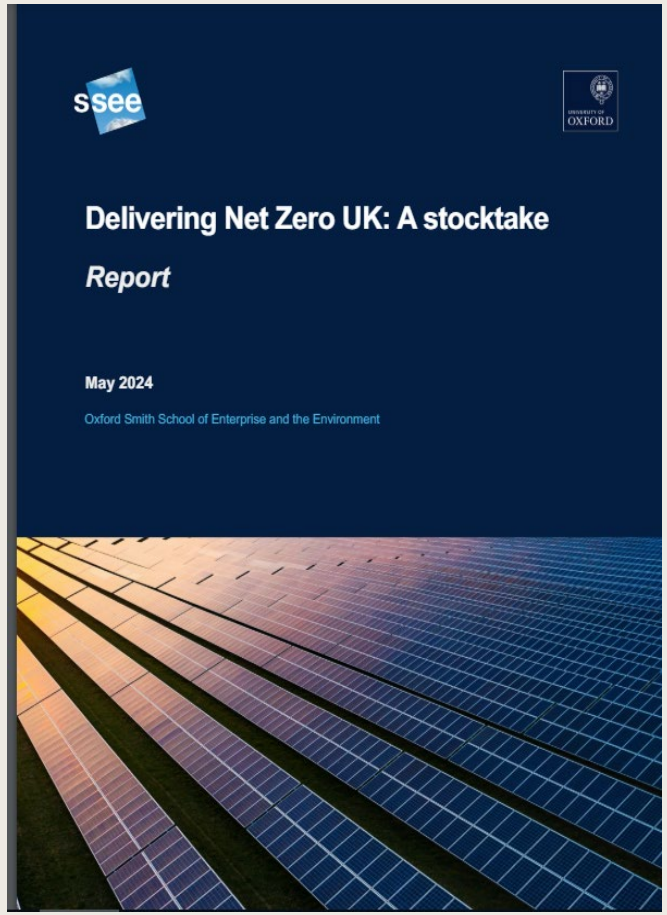
IV. Participating in Advisory Committees

Future of Cooling researchers appointed expert advisors to UK parliamentary enquiry on heat resilience and sustainable cooling

Shaping questions that go into the enquiry, making recommendations on witnesses, drafting outcome document for government

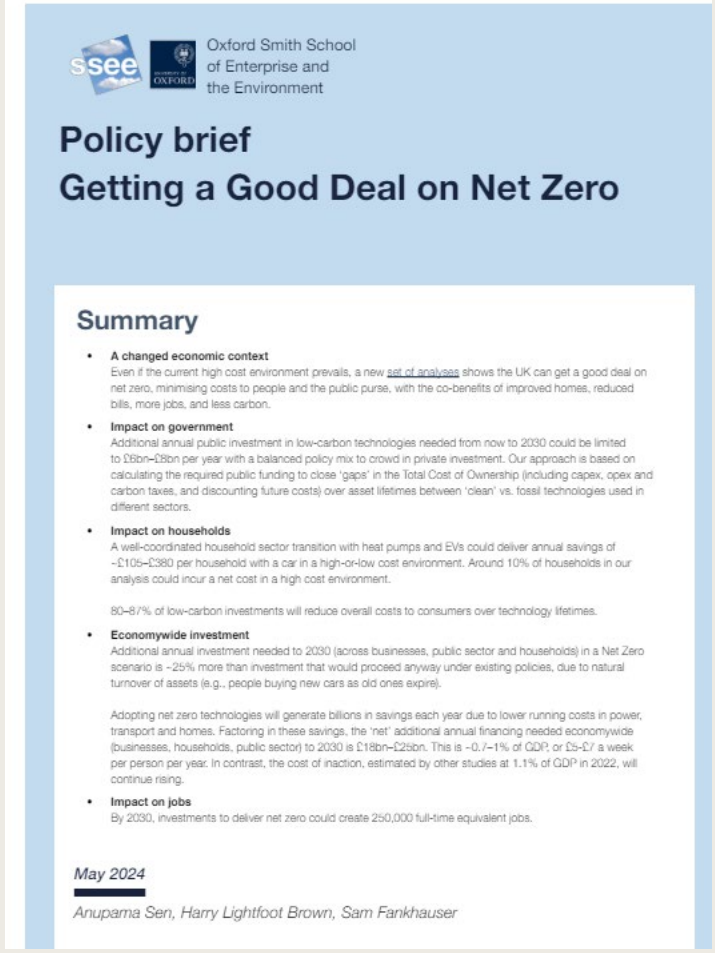
Demand-led example : Cost of UK Net Zero

Technical Report…



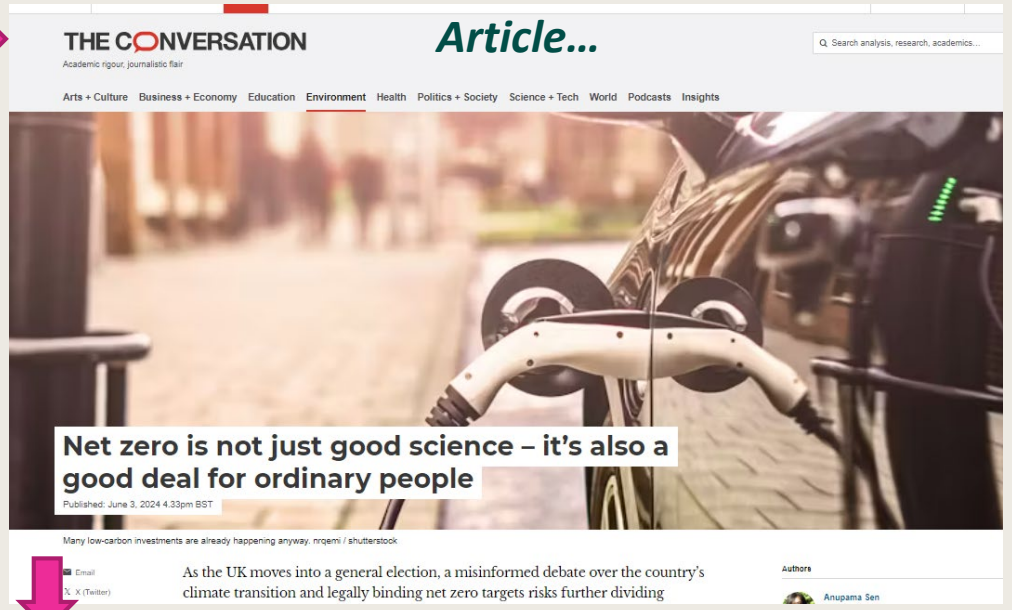
Source: SSEE Policy Brief

Policy Brief…



Source: SSEE Policy Brief

Article…



Source: The Conversation

Meetings with…

Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

Climate Change Committee

HM Treasury

Cited in…

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Global Youth Climate Training

- **A free, online initiative empowering young people aged 16-35 with the skills, knowledge and confidence to shape and influence climate policy**
- Launched in 2023, the programme sets the global standard for inclusive, high-impact climate education.
- Designed to demystify UNFCCC negotiations ahead of COP28, the programme has trained 5,000+ young leaders from across 177 countries on key topics like Climate Finance, Loss & Damage, and Adaptation.
- Our open-access, multilingual model (available in English, Mandarin, Spanish, Arabic, French and Portuguese) ensures accessibility for young people globally, especially those from the Most Affected People and Areas (MAPA), who have comprised over 60% of participants.
- Each year, the programme offers a limited number of competitive bursaries to support outstanding participants in attending the UN Climate Change Conference (COP).
- **Winner of the University of Oxford Vice Chancellor's Award for Environmental Sustainability, 2024**

Global Youth Climate Training participants at COP29 supported by Oxford Smith School Bursaries

Summer SCENE

- **Sustainability, Climate and Environmental Education online course with 50 fully funded places for policy makers in the Global South**

- Summer SCENE empowers a youth and early career audience (<30 yrs of age) from over 100 countries (so far) in the Global South to engage with sustainability policy.

- After exploring a range of sustainability topics, students work to develop a policy recommendation for world leaders to be published at the end of the course. In 2025, the winning brief will be presented at COP30 in Brazil.

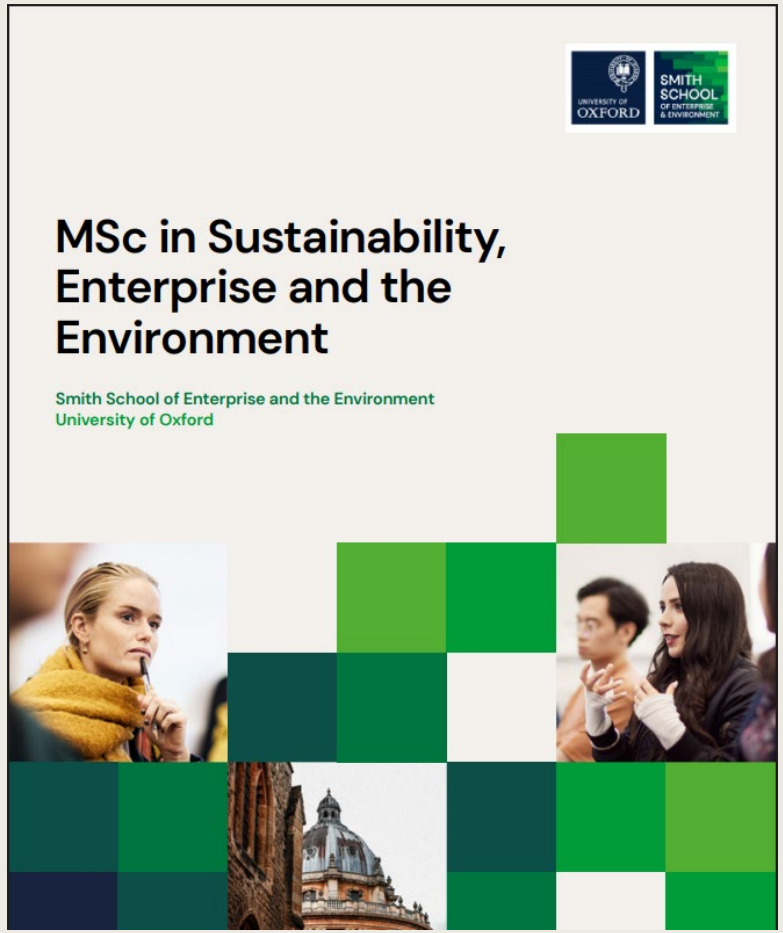
- **Delivered in a live webinar format, the course provides opportunities for participants to network with peers, world-renowned Oxford faculty and experts, and student facilitators on current Oxford MSc and DPhil courses**

MSc Sustainability, Enterprise & the Environment

- Our MSc in Sustainability, Enterprise and the Environment (MSc SEE) – receiving one of highest numbers of applications to Oxford MSc courses - aims to address two pervasive and unmet challenges of our time: making the transition to a zero-carbon and environmentally sustainable economic model, whilst simultaneously enabling sustainable development for everyone.

- The course views these challenges through the lenses of finance, economics and enterprise – both public and private – whilst also leveraging the environmental, systems and data sciences.

- MSc SEE will equip students with the rigorous academic knowledge and applied skills needed to understand and accelerate the transition to a zero-carbon, environmentally sustainable economic model.



The African Nature Fellowship

- A bold, collaborative initiative with the African Natural Capital Alliance (ANCA) and the African Leadership University (ALU) to empower African leaders in sustainable development and resilience

- The African Nature Fellowship programme supports cohorts of professionals on a year-long course to gain deep expertise in natural capital and biodiversity valuation, strengthen leadership capacity, and join a collaborative pan-African network of experts. Participants span a wide range of sectors, including finance, conservation, law, indigenous communities and technology.

- By equipping emerging leaders with cutting-edge knowledge, practical skills, and powerful networks, this course supports a more resilient, prosperous future rooted in the protection and regeneration of Africa's natural capital. The programme helps leaders transform their communities and help secure the continent's environmental and economic wellbeing for generations to come.

In summary…

- We face continuing global headwinds on climate action.
- Much of this is rooted in misconceptions around what the science tells us.
- **Research for the public good** should aim at providing robust evidence on the twin crises of nature and climate.
- But it's not just about academic research. Research needs to be translated and made accessible.
- We continue to engage with governments, businesses and civil society through three pillars:
  Research + Impact + Education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