

Divest-Invest: Case Study University of Bedfordshire

This case study was co-developed with Beds SU (University of Bedfordshire). It outlines the simple process they went through to get the university signed up to NUS and People & Planet's co-created [Fossil Fuel Declaration](#). This exists for universities that have no investments in the fossil fuel industry; to affirm their current fossil free status, as well as their commitment to remain so in the future. Through signing up to the declaration these institutions join the global fossil fuel divestment movement.

In January 2015 Bedfordshire were the second university in the UK to make a public commitment to fully divest from fossil fuels - following the University of Glasgow in October 2014. And in October 2018 they reaffirmed this commitment by adding their signature to the declaration. This resource has been created to act as a case study to support other folk campaigning on divestment

and reinvestment – and will be of particular use to those campaigning at institutions that do not have investments. If you are not sure if this is relevant to your institution and/or want to know if you're at a university that is already fossil free, check out People & Planet's Fossil Fuel Scorecards [here](#).

What campaign are you from and what were your demands to the university?

Bedfordshire. As an institution that had already 100% divested from fossil fuels, we lobbied the university to sign the declaration to ensure their continued commitment to divestment.

To what extent were your campaign demands met?

Completely. The Vice-Chancellor has consistently supported the fossil fuel declaration at various steps since the end of our campaign.

Please share how signing up to the declaration began at Bedfordshire – for example, when the campaign started.

Back in 2017 our CEO caught word of a divestment strategic planning day taking place in Bristol. After considering the issue and realising that we had a solid chance to turn it into a full campaign, we sent a staff member along to build knowledge of how to turn the idea of a campaign into reality.



Please share how you got the university to sign up to the Fossil Fuel Declaration.

1) The Students' Union attended NUS and People & Planet's Annual Divestment & Reinvestment Strategy Day in September 2017 at UWE Students' Union. This gave the Sustainability Champion the knowledge to start planning what a campaign with the end result of the institution signing [the declaration](#) might look like.

2) The knowledge gained was passed on to the Vice President of Equality, Jasmine Yeates, who was also responsible for championing sustainability and environment related campaigns as part of their role. They would also be the Students' Union lead on discussions with the institution.

3) Beds SU's Vice President of Equality started to engage in discussions with the Vice-Chancellor to secure his signature on [the Fossil Fuel Declaration](#). Alongside this Beds SU's Sustainability Champion liaised with the institutions Head of Sustainability to ensure that there would be no complications in the process.

4) After the Vice-Chancellor had agreed to sign the declaration, Beds SU used the [Fossil Fuel Declaration](#) template to draft a letter for him to sign. This was checked by the Head of Sustainability before going to the Vice-Chancellor.

5) After getting the Vice-Chancellor's signature, Beds SU sent the letter back to [NUS](#) and [People & Planet](#) for them to publish the university's signature on their websites.

The university made a full divestment commitment in January 2015, what made you decide to ask them to sign the declaration?

Being one of the first universities in the UK to divest from fossil fuels, we wanted to ensure that the University of Bedfordshire stayed on the leading edge of the sector! We have a good

relationship with the institution on sustainability topics, so they were more than willing to engage in conversation.

What tactics did you use to win on getting the university to sign the fossil fuel declaration? Which ones do you feel were most effective?

We raised the issue in two key meetings for campaigning. The first was the institutions Sustainability Steering Group. Here we looked at what it would mean to the university to sign the declaration, whether it would have any negative effects, and how we could publish it both internally and externally.

The second meeting was our Executive Officers' regular meeting with the Vice-Chancellor. This is where we were looking for full sign off on the declaration.

For us, going out and having conversations in person, as well as keeping everyone in the loop was the most effective method of getting the institution to sign the declaration.

What role(s) did the Students' Union play in this campaign?

Beds SU were the main instigator in getting the university to sign the fossil fuel declaration. This was setup following a day in attendance at the NUS and People & Planet strategy day. This also set Beds SU up as the main line of contact between People & Planet and the institution.

How did those organising on this campaign work together? Were there any areas of cohesion and/or contention? If there was contention how did you overcome this?

We found that taking part in this process was an easy task! Both union and university teams were working together towards the same goal, with no contention arising during the process. This is where getting the right people in the right room at the right time plays out, no one is kept out of the loop and therefore everyone can have their voice heard!

If you could give three pieces of advice to other fossil fuel divestment and reinvestment campaigners what would they be? This might include advice for those at institutions that could sign the Fossil Fuel Declaration.

The top three pieces of advice was a tricky one! But the following would apply to most institutions looking at divestment strategies:

- 1) Always make sure you have the end goal in sight. Do you want full divestment within 1 year or are you just looking towards signing the declaration? Having an end goal in sight will keep your focus on the right path.
- 2) Get the right people in the right room. There will be individuals or teams in your institution that are in great places to help you achieve your goals, find out who they are and just arrange to meet them for a chat!
- 3) Take in as much advice from NUS and People & Planet as you possibly can! They know everything that you'll need to open conversations with your institution to get the job done!

Following this victory, what will you be focusing on as campaigners?

Our focus now has shifted to more general sustainability topics. Since the fossil fuel declaration, we've managed to ban single use plastics in our SU outlets, we've implemented a coffee cup recycling scheme and we're now looking at branching out to do more work with the local community.

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