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Dr Alex Hope: Empowering young people to take action on climate change

Climate change is affecting every country in the world, and we need to act now to protect our planet - not just for us, but for generations to come. It is the young people of today who will face the worst effects if we do not.

Our role as educators, is to elevate the voices of young people, giving them the tools and the confidence they need to actively address climate change – whether through education, technology, science, law or business.

As part of its strategy Northumbria University is committed to helping young

people fight climate change and is continuing to develop a broad portfolio of sustainability initiatives – one of which is a commitment from our Newcastle Business School to put sustainability at the forefront of its curriculum.

We are one of 38 higher education institutions from around the world to be a United Nations PRME Champion School. PRME is a United Nations led initiative to embed Principles for Responsible Management Education in business and management schools. Its aim is to raise the profile of sustainability and equip students – our future business leaders – with the understanding and ability to deliver change for tomorrow.

Founded in 2007, PRME is the education arm of the United Nations Global Compact, the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, which encourages businesses to commit to sustainability and share responsibility for achieving a better world. PRME has over 800 signatories world wide and is the largest relationship between the UN and Higher Education.

Business as a force of good

In 2015, all United Nations Member States adopted the Agenda for Sustainable Development which has 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the heart of the plan. These goals are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - to work towards ending extreme poverty, fighting inequality and injustice, and protecting our planet over the next nine years.

Businesses have an important role to play in implementing the SDGs. By working together with governments, civil society and citizens they can help create a more sustainable future.

Northumbria University is committed to sustainability and ensuring our students develop the knowledge, behaviours and skills to be confident, proactive global citizens.

Dr Alex Hope, Head of Department: Leadership and HRM and Associate Professor of Business Ethics, led the implementation of the PRME Initiative in the University's Newcastle Business School. He said: "Northumbria supports the UN's sustainable development goals through our research, education, operations, campuses and partnerships. Sustainability is a core part of the

University's strategy and Newcastle Business School has embedded it across our taught curriculum.

"PRME's vision is to create a global movement and drive thought leadership on responsible management education. As a business school we have a responsibility to help further the world and change the narrative when it comes to developing future leaders. We have the ability to influence students with responsible and sustainable business practices and use business as a force of good."

Leading by example

Northumbria University is in the top quartile of higher education institutions which are embedding sustainability in their curriculum. It is the 4th most sustainable university in the UK (People & Planet, 2019) and came 50th in the Times Higher Education Impact League - a global league table ranking universities on their contribution to the SDGs- in 2021 out of over 1,000 ranked universities. In 2019, Northumbria won the National Green Gown Award for 'Benefitting Society' (2019) and it is committed to encouraging both its staff and students to live more sustainable lives.

Embedding sustainability

In addition to his work at Northumbria University, Dr Hope is Co-Chair of the UN PRME Climate Change and Environment working group, and a past Vice-Chair of the UK and Ireland UN PRME Chapter.

The Climate and Environment working group is assisting business schools by acting as a resource for all organisations who wish to embed climate change and environmental education into their teaching and training. It brings together academics and practitioners from over 20 different countries who have committed to taking action to promote climate change education and action.

One of its objectives is to share good ideas, best practice and innovative training methods on how to integrate climate change and other sustainability issues into management education and training within universities. As part of this, Dr Hope recently spoke to UK university Vice-Chancellors on embedding sustainability and responsible behaviour in education at the Universities UK

annual conference.

He said: “There is a huge push for tackling climate change and universities have a vital role to play. The UK government has pledged to support the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and SDG 13, covers climate action.

“One of the goal’s targets is to improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning – this includes primary, secondary and tertiary curricula. This means that schools, colleges and universities need to commit to teaching children and young people about climate change and ensuring it is embedded in the curriculum along with other environmental issues.

“Young people are driving the climate change agenda as they have been given more of a voice due to success of the Fridays for Future movement led by Greta Thunberg. We need to build on this to empower young people to take action to create a sustainable society and future for generations to come. As a PRME Champion School, we are leading the way in embedding sustainability in our curriculum and research, and I am proud that Northumbria is acting as a role model and exemplar of best practice to other higher education institutions around the world.”

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. Find out more about us at www.northumbria.ac.uk --- Please contact our Media and Communications team at media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk with any media enquiries or interview requests ---

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