

L-R: Prof Guillaume Zoppi, Dr Vincent Barrioz, Dr Lu Xing and Prof Neil Beattie from the ReNU+ team at Northumbria University

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£11m funding to expand access to renewable energy research in North East

World-leading research from three North East universities to advance renewable energy technologies has received a welcome boost, with the announcement of almost £11.5 million to expand their work and include people from under-represented groups and non-traditional educational backgrounds to drive the transition to Net Zero.

An award of £5.3 million from the [Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council](#) will enable Northumbria, Newcastle and Durham

Universities to further develop [ReNU](#), their successful Centre for Doctoral Training in renewable energies, which was formed in 2019.

This award is complemented by contributions from partner universities and companies resulting in a total value of nearly £11.5 million.

The funding will [create ReNU+](#) – the ESRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Renewable Energy Northeast Universities Plus – which will help the UK government progress towards its Net Zero aims for a low carbon economy.

The announcement is part of the [UK's biggest-ever investment in doctoral skills training](#) in engineering and physical sciences, totalling more than £1 billion, which was announced by Science, Innovation and Technology Secretary Michelle Donelan today (Tuesday 12 March).

[ReNU+](#) will be distinctive from other areas of renewable energy research due to its emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusion, and its partnerships with local government, industry and charities.

The centre will widen access to doctoral level training to those with non-traditional educational backgrounds, encouraging those in under-represented groups such as people who are unemployed or disabled, carers and military veterans to train as doctoral carbon champions.

This will bring new perspectives and lived experiences that are essential for an urgent and equitable transition to Net Zero, from looking at new forms of investment and regulation through to encouraging end users to engage with new innovations.

The universities will also work closely with key partners across local government, industry and charities to support ReNU⁺ including [Northumbrian Water](#), [SSE](#), [Port of Tyne](#), the [NHS](#), [Newcastle City Council](#), North of Tyne Combined Authority and more.

This support includes direct sponsorship of doctoral research projects and delivery of a high-skill training programme.

Access to doctoral level training through ReNU⁺ will also be available, for the first time, to people who are not enrolled on a PhD programme, with training

modules made available for businesses to support the continuing professional development and upskilling of their staff.

Professor of Energy Innovation, [Neil Beattie](#), of Northumbria University, will lead ReNU⁺. He explained: “There is a clear need for investment in renewable energy in the United Kingdom. Locally generated renewable energy will provide the UK with increased energy security and critically important additions in electricity capacity to meet domestic and industrial demands.

“However, achieving Net Zero is a problem for all of society, and by nature, therefore, needs an inclusive approach.

“ReNU⁺ is a transformative programme that will train a new generation of doctoral carbon champions who are characterised by scientific and engineering excellence and capable of interdisciplinary systemic thinking to accelerate Net Zero. They will meet critical needs in high-skill employment across industry, policy, education and government and convert key challenges in resilience and equity into economic opportunities for the United Kingdom.”

[Professor Andy Long](#), Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Northumbria University said: “Social mobility and widening access are embedded in Northumbria University’s mission. We need to make much more of our country’s existing talent pools through reskilling, upskilling and training.

“With almost 700,000 new jobs forecast in the UK in the low carbon and renewable energy economy, it is vital that we work to create future leaders for this sector, and it is even more important that these leaders come from diverse and inclusive backgrounds to ensure our transition to a low carbon economy is equitable and sustainable.

“We are delighted to be working in partnership with the universities of Durham and Newcastle, and with industry and local government across the North East region, in this hugely important area of research.”

Northumbrian Water Group (NWG) is backing ReNU⁺ by co-funding up to four PhD studentships and facilitating site visits for postgraduate researchers to provide broader insight into water sector challenges.

Anthony Browne, NWG’s Energy and Decarbonisation Manager, said: “NWG is

excited to continue its successful partnership with Northumbria University and ReNU⁺. Moving to a resilient, efficient and sustainable energy system is a cornerstone of our journey to Net Zero and our continued progress in this area is good for customers, communities and the environment. Technical and academic partnership with ReNU⁺ ensures that NWG is able to maintain best practice whilst also delivering cutting-edge sustainable technologies.”

ReNU⁺ is one of [a number of new centres for doctoral training](#) announced by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology today.

The Rt Hon Michelle Donelan, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, said: “As innovators across the world break new ground faster than ever, it is vital that government, business and academic invests in ambitious UK talent, giving them the tools to pioneer new discoveries that benefit all our lives while creating new jobs and growing the economy.

“By targeting critical technologies including artificial intelligence and future telecoms, we are supporting world class universities across the UK to build the skills base we need to unleash the potential of future tech and maintain our country’s reputation as a hub of cutting-edge research and development.”

[Professor Charlotte Deane](#), Executive Chair of the [Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council](#), said “The Centres for Doctoral Training announced today will help to prepare the next generation of researchers, specialists and industry experts across a wide range of sectors and industries.

“The new centres are a vivid illustration of the UK’s depth of expertise and potential, which will help us to tackle large-scale, complex challenges and benefit society and the economy.”

While the existing ReNU centre will continue to run to 2027, the universities are preparing to train more than 50 additional doctoral carbon champions through ReNU⁺ over the next eight years. The first cohort of students are expected to enrol in autumn 2025.

Click here to [find out more about ReNU⁺](#).

UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR 2022 (Times Higher Education Awards)

Northumbria is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Two thirds of Northumbria's undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate, meaning Northumbria is making a significant contribution to upskilling the North East of England.

Find out more about us at www.northumbria.ac.uk

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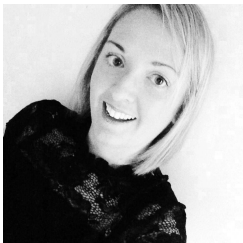
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