

Circular economy direction of travel for London's higher education institutions



Why a direction of travel statement?

London has taken a leading role in tackling climate change by being the first city to commit to being a zero carbon city by 2050¹, compatible with the highest ambition of the Paris Agreement. London also has the opportunity to lead the way in developing a new, circular economy. In 2015, the London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) identified higher education as one of the enabling sectors to support London in its transition to a circular economy. Both LWARB and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (the Foundation) have set out areas across which we believe higher education has a large role to play in supporting London's transition to a circular economy. LWARB has three clear recommendations in the 2017 circular route map for London and these mirror three of the five key drivers identified by the Foundation as levers within the higher education sector:

1. Leadership and Influence
2. Leading Circular Economy Research
3. Circular Economy Teaching Across All Disciplines
4. Student Action
5. Campus Management

This statement sets a direction of travel and aims to unite the higher education institutions across London towards achieving a vision whereby:

- Every student engages with the circular economy when they choose to study at an institution in London
- Applied research at London universities supports London businesses' circular ambitions
- All London's higher education institutions are circular in their operations
- Students are empowered to drive forward circular economy activities both on and off campus within the city
- London's higher education institutions work closely with local and regional governments in a variety of ways to support the city's circular economy ambitions

Signing up to the direction of travel statement will signal a sea-change from the sector in a key global city and help secure London's place on the global circular economy stage. If all London's higher education institutions work towards the objectives laid out in this direction of travel statement, the collective impact is anticipated to help drive the pace of change required.

This direction of travel statement will run for five years with a progress report in 2022 and with the ambition of engaging at least 75% of London's higher education institutions by 2025.

¹ Mayor of London, Zero carbon London: A 1.5°C compatible plan (December 2018)

Direction of travel statement

1. Leadership and Influence

In recognising the key role higher education institutions play as hubs for change, London's higher education institutions will explore ways they can support the circular economy transition at a city level through research and shared experience. Activities could include:

- Working closely with businesses in London to both promote adoption of, and to expose students to, circular business practices
- Seeking collaborative working with local boroughs and influencing local strategic direction through evidence and research
- Working with the London Mayor's office and LWARB to support advancements towards a circular city through collaboration and research
- Educating the wider community through exhibitions, opening up campus activities or knowledge-sharing

2. Leading Circular Economy Research

London's higher education institutions will need to recognise challenges to the acceleration towards a circular economy as research opportunities, and incorporate these challenges into their students' research programmes. Activities could include:

- Working with 'Advance London' businesses and other circular economy start-ups through student research projects and true collaboration over time
- Collaborating with the circular economy centres of excellence across the country to ensure London benefits from the latest thinking and research across the identified material flows
- Engaging with London's 'Circular Economy PhD group' (to be set up)

3. Circular Economy Teaching Across All Disciplines

London's higher education institutions will need to continue to increase the number of circular economy courses, modules, and other academic programmes they have on offer. In recognising the interdisciplinary nature of the circular economy and that gaining knowledge and understanding of circular economy principles will be key to reshaping the global economy, higher education institutions will work towards ensuring circular economy knowledge forms part of every London student's learning journey. This could include:

- New undergraduate modules on 'introduction to circular economy' accessible to all students
- Promotion of attendance at circular economy webinar programmes, such as the Foundation's From Linear to Circular programme
- Linking to the Foundation's content through student registrations
- Building circular economy content into existing course programmes
- Increasing postgraduate programmes on circular economy

4. Student Action

London's higher education institutions must support and enable student-led action that supports London's transition to a circular city. Statistics show that 70% of students studying at a London university go on to work in the city. The more access students have to applying circular economy principles while they are studying, the more this will benefit the knowledge and skills they take into the workforce. This could include:

- Students leading the charge on circular canteens or food programmes (such as 'Growhampton'²)
- Students developing circular business ideas within university incubators / accelerators
- Students leading circular economy events (such as Harvard students running a circular economy symposium in 2020)

5. Campus Management

London's higher education institutions must act as local leaders, demonstrating circular economy practices across their estate operations. It is often easy to forget that education institutions are businesses in their own right and have significant purchasing power – both in revenue for goods and services as well as capital in building and estates. Harnessing this spend and moving it towards more circular suppliers and or business models will significantly disrupt the supply chain and also demonstrate circular economy in practice. This could include:

- Joint procurement between institutions, such as the 'New York Campus Aggregate Renewable Energy Solution' consortium (NYCARES)
- Rethinking how contracts are renewed / let – can circular economy be included in the tender specifications, for example?
- Ensuring materials are reused / refurbished and shared as a priority (significant savings can be made in this regard)
- Using food sharing apps, such as 'Olio' and 'Too good To Go', to ensure canteen / restaurant waste is minimised
- Sharing circular economy practices in order to help create a list of circular higher education campus management practices to share with the global stage.