

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

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BE THE 'GREENEST GOVERNMENT EVER' FOR UNIVERSITIES

Higher education has a unique and leading role to play in sustainable development. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that climate change is unequivocal and that human activities make a big contribution. The 2006 Stern Review, 'The economics of climate change', showed how the benefits of strong early action greatly outweigh the costs of inaction. The overwhelming view of scientists is that without large reductions to our carbon emissions, we are likely to see adverse climate change with severe impacts on coastal communities, food supplies and the number of species.

The higher education sector is already demonstrating strong commitment supported by policy interventions that have been successful in developing good practice and encouraging change. Universities have produced carbon management plans and challenging carbon reduction targets which will move the sector towards legally binding national targets. Research commissioned by HEFCE shows that for those with data for both years, emissions per student (full-time equivalent) were on average 64 per cent higher in 1990 than in 2005. The best HEIs are leaders in the field but the challenge is large and momentum needs to increase.

Higher education has the potential to lead wider society and is already doing so, making a substantial contribution through teaching and research, business operations, and influence on communities, staff and students. Universities can effect powerful social change through the behaviours students adopt at this formative time in their lives. Such leadership is being called for by students and the skills, knowledge and attitudes that they themselves acquire as a result will make a lasting difference.

'It is crucial that the sector contributes strongly to sustainable development. It can do so by training and expanding minds; researching answers to challenges and informing public policy; showing its own understanding and commitment through careful campus management; and by being a responsible employer and active member of the business and local community.' (Lord Stern of Brentford, London School of Economics and Political Science, Foreword to 'Sustainable development in higher education' HEFCE 2009/03)

In some respects this agenda is pushing at an open door; employers and professional institutions are seeking graduates with an understanding of sustainable development and this is affecting student choices. The vision for a

new 'green economy' presents a range of employment opportunities and universities are responding to the demands of students and employers.

In addition the location of a new £50 million centre that will accelerate the commercialisation of green technologies was recently announced by the Business Secretary Vince Cable.

The Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult will be headquartered at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow with an operational centre at the National Renewable Energy Centre (Narec) in the North East of England.

The national centre will focus on technologies for offshore wind, wave and tidal power and is designed to bridge the gap between university research and full commercialisation. It will have a UK wide remit, and build strong links with centres of excellence such as Wave Hub and the marine energy park in the South West of England.