# Empowering the Eco-Anxious

Evaluating the extent to which education and participation initiatives at the University of Leeds address eco-anxiety.

By Eliza Taswell-Fryer, Sop Satchwell, Vaibhav Pramode Nair, Ellie Overton, Hina Komiya, Jyoti Narsude, Prahelika Deka, Safia Khan, Yiying Wang, and Susan Ann Samuel

## Eco-anxiety

Anxiety around climate change in young people - frustration at the lack of action by governments and fear about the future. (Hickman, 2021).

Eco-anxiety can broadly be understood as feelings of fear, guilt, distress, helplessness or hyperactivity in response to climate change (Pihkala, 2022, p.13).

These risks disempower young people who are essential in creating just and long-lasting climate action (United Nations, 2024).

However, channelling + addressing anxiety is key - education + participation can spark action and lead to the blossoming of other, more positive eco-emotions (Pihkala, 2020).

## Education

Lack of knowledge can exacerbate eco anxiety (Charlton-Perez, 2021). Education can help empower young people to be part of positive change and reduce anxious feelings.

### What is the University of Leeds doing?

Sustainability research conference.

Curriculum redefined.

Priestley Centre programs.

### Quote from student:

The 'Towards Eco-Hope’ initiative seeks to foster a greater sense of hope for the future by developing key recommendations in acknowledging eco-anxiety, providing spaces to discuss it, and developing solutions-focused learning within course content.

## Participation

Participating in climate action can help address eco-anxiety by connecting young people to supportive networks and giving people a positive and productive outlet for emotions through taking action (Bauden and Jachens, 2021).

### What is the University of Leeds doing?

Climate week.

Student sustainability architects.

Student societies and Activism.

### Quote from student:

I think the University could create more links between staff and these [student] societies so that students could feel more involved in academic research and academic research could be more connected and informed to grassroots action.

## Where next?

Through the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures, the University is creating more space for students within research spaces: opening up research spaces to young people, empowering them as equals and valuable contributors in this space.

We are increasing engagement from university staff with the rich tapestry of student action, connecting research and education more closely with grass roots action e.g. through our LivingLabs.

We are keen to develop international links to foster greater cooperation.

## About the poster

This poster was developed and created by a team of undergraduate, masters and PhD students at the University of Leeds.

For more information on the project and the initiatives mentioned, visit: <https://climate.leeds.ac.uk/empower-the-eco-anxious/>