

LAWYERS ARE RESPONSIBLE

18 October 2023

**An open letter to UK Vice Chancellors
& HE Educators**

Lawyers Are Responsible Supports Students taking Non-Violent Climate Action on Campuses

Lawyers Are Responsible are a group of lawyers: primarily solicitors and barristers, but also aspiring lawyers and legal academics. We challenge the legal profession's role in enabling the fossil fuel industry. We have signed a Declaration of Conscience, open to all members of the legal profession, in which we commit, amongst other things, to withholding our services in respect of (1) supporting new fossil fuel projects and (2) action against peaceful climate protesters. So far nearly 200 lawyers have signed the Declaration. The Declaration and further details can be found on our website at www.lar.earth.

Since 9 October 2023 students have been taking action on their campuses to highlight the role of UK universities in legitimising the fossil fuel industry. The student wing of Just Stop Oil wrote an open letter to all University Vice Chancellors in the UK on 18 September 2023. This stated:

“By partnering with fossil fuel companies, undertaking research for industrial agriculture, auto, aviation and defence industries, and sending delegates to useless COP conferences, your universities give the government and carbon corporations the veneer of respectability, and the social licence to carry on their project of mass death. You have failed to speak the truth about what is happening, and you have utterly failed to uphold the duty of care you have for your students.”

It is our view that universities ought to be places where science is respected and where students can express themselves. An important role of universities is to develop young people who will go on to take roles that help make the world a better place in which humans and sentient beings flourish. Yet, by partnering with fossil fuel interests and accepting their money, universities are complicit in destroying the future of all young people. To give a couple of examples of how **Oxford University** is *legitimising* the fossil fuel industry: in 2021, Oxford University accepted an £100m donation from oil and gas company INEOS to build a new institute for antimicrobial research in animals – and, in October 2023, Oxford University careers fair welcomed Equinor, the oil company which has recently received approval from the UK government for the controversial massive Rosebank oil development project off Shetland Islands, Scotland.

The science on climate and ecological breakdown is absolutely clear: we urgently need to transition away from fossil fuels. UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated in April 2022: *“We are on a pathway to global warming of more than double the 1.5°C limit agreed in Paris. Some Government and business leaders are saying one thing but doing another. Simply put, they are lying. And the results will be catastrophic. This is a climate emergency... Climate activists are*

sometimes depicted as dangerous radicals. But the truly dangerous radicals are the countries that are increasing the production of fossil fuels.”

We fully endorse this statement and we unconditionally support the actions of students and all people taking non-violent action to draw attention to the climate and ecological emergency. They are brave individuals who are standing up for the future of their and future generations.

We note that so far at least a dozen young people have been arrested for actions on campus, many of them have also been charged with criminal damage. Some young people are also separately threatened with disciplinary action from their universities. We believe that this is wrong.

We ask that Vice Chancellors:

- protect the university campus as a place for legitimate dissent by refusing to press charges for any of these non-violent actions on your campuses,
- openly reject the Government’s attempts to delegitimise and suppress your students’ witness to what is being knowingly done to their generation,
- do not take disciplinary action against the students who took brave, principled action to draw attention to the failure to act on the climate and ecological emergency, and
- listen to the concerns of students, and commit to *not take* any further funding or other support from companies continuing to extract rather than transition away from fossil fuels.

We call on all educators to support their students, to take their concerns seriously and to join with them in resisting the destruction of our collective world and future.

Yours faithfully,

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