



Making the Case for Carbon Literacy in the Civil Service

The Carbon Literacy Project has developed a Toolkit, to enable departments, agencies and public bodies to train their staff in a day's worth of action-based learning. The initial development of the materials was funded by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) via the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The Toolkit has been partly co-written by BEIS and tested and piloted by a panel of government departments. This document provides you with some initial guidance and materials to assist you in pitching Carbon Literacy.

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1. What is Carbon Literacy?

Carbon Literacy provides staff with ‘an awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis.’

The UN recognised The Carbon Literacy Project as one of 100 projects worldwide that could materially change the way we deal with climate change under the ‘Transformative Actions Program’ at COP21.

Staff who successfully complete a day’s worth of approved Carbon Literacy learning are certified as Carbon Literate. As part of certification, learners are required to complete an action plan where they must commit to both a significant individual and group action to reduce their carbon footprint. Upon successful assessment, a learner is awarded a uniquely numbered certificate to evidence their Carbon Literacy, and confirm that they have met the requirements of The Carbon Literacy Standard.

Find out how many people are currently Carbon Literate [here](#).

‘All staff must receive Carbon Literacy training. It is relevant to every single job role and net zero will not be achieved by anything less than everyone playing their part.’

- **The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education**

2. Why Carbon Literacy in the Civil Service?

Education, raising awareness, sharing knowledge and showcasing best practice are key to making informed decisions. Carbon Literacy training provides Civil Servants with the tools to lead by example in how they procure, run and govern operations and clearly communicate the rationale for behaviour change in a way that resonates with the public. Foci on relevance, equity, positivity, and directly implementable action planning creates immediately applicable and supported learning; driven by the individual.

By equipping learners with an awareness and instinct of the climate impacts of decisions, Carbon Literacy empowers Civil Servants with the agency to recognise opportunities for carbon reduction and create and implement solutions both in their professional and personal lives. Pledging their own carbon reduction actions mid-training allows learners to engage with collective ambitions and devise more effective solutions, increasing shared ownership and buy-in. As experts in their fields, Civil Servants understand the unique issues their department

faces. Who better to come up with solutions than your staff collaboratively working cross-departmentally?

'In September 2021, the department launched its Carbon Literacy training programme to build capability within DfT staff to enable the delivery of Net Zero. The training is accredited by The Carbon Literacy Project (a charitable organisation) and it reflects the department's commitment to establish a sustainable low carbon culture that will support the transition to Net Zero.' [Link](#)

- **The Rt Hon Andrew Stephenson MP, Former Secretary of State for Transport**

'We want everybody in the organisation to understand that their job is actually a climate job ... Carbon Literacy is helping people to understand I can do something about this. I might not be working in the sustainability team – but I can do something.'

- **Simon Dawes, Head of Net Zero and Circular Economy, Environment Agency**

3. The Civil Service Toolkit

With the generous support of BEIS, we developed off the shelf Toolkits together with partner organisations for five public sector audiences; Central Government, Local Authorities, Universities, the NHS and Blue Light services. We co-developed the Civil Service Toolkit with BEIS to maximise the ease and speed of adoption of Carbon Literacy across the Civil Service. The Toolkit is designed to be off the shelf, yet flexible and adaptable, to be customisable to your department's climate strategy, carbon footprint and unique needs.

The Toolkit is in an easily accessible format for in-house delivery. It consists of all the resources needed to deliver training: slides, a comprehensive trainer manual that guides you through every step of the training, activity resources and a 'getting started' pack.

4. What will your staff gain from the training?

In a day's worth of interactive learning, your staff will:

- Gain an understanding of the basic science of climate change and how climate change will affect us both globally and in the UK.
- Explore how Civil Servants can provide leadership in the climate emergency.
- Consider how climate change can be integrated into their day-to-day decision making, role and policy.

- Explore how climate action can be co-ordinated across the Civil Service.
- Be equipped with the knowledge and skills to articulate the scale and significance of climate change.
- Create an action plan to help reduce the carbon footprint of your department or agency.

5. Beyond climate

By embedding awareness of the climate impacts of everyday actions, Carbon Literacy training enables staff to make informed decisions to cut carbon, energy and waste in your department, but what other benefits does Carbon Literacy provide?

The Energy Saving Trust reports that the key advantages of implementing an **employee behavioural change programme** are:

1. **Reduced energy bills and transport costs.**
2. **Improved employee morale, satisfaction and productivity.**
3. **Enhanced image and credibility.**
4. **Up-to-date knowledge and information for your staff.**

6. The financial case for Carbon Literacy

- Carbon Literacy generates energy, resource and financial savings; Jacobs UK indicate that typical carbon savings from behavioural approaches similar to Carbon Literacy are at least 5-15% per person.

'To say [Carbon Literacy] has been something of a life changing experience for me, is probably not an overstatement.... In hard economic terms, so far we have already reduced our organisation's energy consumption significantly, and this has saved us over £10,000 this year alone. All the more impressive perhaps when you consider that we've been doing this now for less than six months.'

- **Building Operations and Logistics Manager from The Atkinson, Southport**

'Carbon Literacy will save our company money, increase our staff's well-being and most of all enable us to bring these skills to our tenants. They will benefit through lower bills, healthier lifestyles and greater employability. Based on the pledges the staff made during the training, the estimated initial carbon saving is 77 tonnes CO₂.'

- **CEO, Northwards Housing**

7. The social case for Carbon Literacy

- Carbon Literacy provides staff with the opportunity to actively engage with your department's priorities and ambitions, and the knowledge and skills to cascade and embed environmentally sustainable and socially responsible values throughout your department and beyond. Carbon Literate employees are more environmentally conscious and inclined to engage with environmental and social initiatives.

8. How can training be rolled out across your department?

- Designate a few staff to take part in a Carbon Literacy course to get a sense of what Carbon Literacy might look for your department.
- Once Carbon Literate, staff can then roll out training to other staff. This creates a cascade effect, whereby as you roll out the training, there are more Carbon Literate staff who can take their turn in delivering training. You don't need to be a certified trainer to deliver Carbon Literacy training as the materials come with a comprehensive trainer manual that guides you through every step of the training.
- The Carbon Literate Organisation (CLO) accreditation offers organisations a visible 'badge' that showcases their commitment to a low carbon culture. There are four levels of accreditation; Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. Over 130 organisations are accredited as Carbon Literate Organisations.

9. Testimonial videos

Speakers from BEIS, Department for Transport, the Office of Government Property and the British Embassy in Zagreb showcased their experiences of delivering the training at the Toolkit's [launch event](#).

[Environment Agency Gold Carbon Literate Organisation testimonial video](#)

[Government Office for Science Bronze Carbon Literate Organisation testimonial video](#)

The British Antarctic Survey's [testimonial video](#), showcasing Carbon Literacy training on our 7th continent!

The British Embassy in Zagreb have trained all of their staff, [including the world's first Carbon Literate Ambassador](#).

10. What do departments say about their experiences?

'One of our biggest priorities is to boost Carbon Literacy within the government property profession and deliver a learning and development programme for the thousands of property professionals working on property in government.' [Link](#)

- **Dr Janet Young, Government Head of Property Profession at Cabinet Office**

'The Carbon Literacy Project provides really useful tools for getting staff to think about carbon impacts and possible reductions. The training sparked some interesting conversations between staff and helped inspire us to incorporate environmental considerations into our day jobs.'

- **Eliza Prettyman, DCMS**

Here's what the Director General of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, Government of Western Australia had to say.

11. Pledges from civil servants

'Quality assuring supplier carbon reduction plans and making the quality of these plans directly linked to the requirement of a contract.'

'I will commit to building a carbon budget into our team's charter and include a commitment within that to making carbon impact a consideration of all the decisions we make as a team.'

'Encourage colleagues in the Social & Behavioural Research Team to take Carbon Literacy training and work together on how we commission research projects - as part of the procurement of research projects, we evaluate supplier bids on the basis of their technical ability and price. A new criteria (Social Value) has been added as a mandatory evaluation criteria, but the research team lack the expertise to evaluate this criteria properly - that is, until

they go on Carbon Literacy training. My idea is to encourage others in the team to attend this course, and then we will work together on a crib sheet to help us assess bidder responses to the Social Value criteria. This will guide the marks we give to bidders for this criteria (covering things like how suppliers will travel to meetings and research events, use of paper, email / file transfer protocols, etc.). It will also strengthen the questions that are put to bidders in the invitation to tender (we can be more prescriptive in what good looks like from a carbon perspective) and during the bidder q and a sessions / clarification question element of bids.'

'As part of our review for overseas travel we conduct a risk assessment document. I am going to add to that a carbon emissions assessment, looking at what the trip will do in relation to carbon emissions. We could also look at team limits for emissions in any financial year. This could then determine what travel the team conducts over the year, making us think more strategically about our travel not just in relation to cost, but also CO2 ...'

'My commitment is to push much harder to influence political decisions, funding decisions and procurement standing orders to enable carbon reduction at every stage of the process – e.g., procurement of local suppliers, evidencing supply chain carbon commitments as part of tenders and monitoring.'

'I'm going to investigate with HR if we can introduce additional leave to help people make sustainable travel choices - taking the train, rather than flying.'

12. What could be perceived as barriers?

These are some of the potential barriers that you may be faced with when making the case for Carbon Literacy training.

'We don't have the time'

- Would you omit information from a health and safety induction to save time? Climate change will impact the health and safety of current and future generations.
- There are many different ways to deliver Carbon Literacy training, for example through workshops or via e-learning. For part-time or contracted staff, e-learning could give greater flexibility for your staff. Learning can also be broken down into a series of smaller sessions.

- Part of responding to the climate emergency is dedicating the time to understanding how the climate emergency will affect your department and then planning how you can respond to it.
- Carbon Literacy can be used to further enhance existing activities such as CPD, community-based initiatives or workplace inductions.

‘We don’t have the capacity and resources’

- The Toolkit is designed to be rolled out with minimal input from the trainer to maximise the ease and speed of adoption of Carbon Literacy training for your department. The Toolkit consists of all the resources needed to deliver training and comes with a comprehensive trainer manual that guides you through every step of the training.

‘Cost’

- Carbon Literacy is an investment that will payback and will be more than offset by the financial and resource savings made through employees being more environmentally and carbon conscious.

13. FAQ

Why is Carbon Literacy a day’s worth of learning?

Significant levels of behaviour change are required to limit global heating to under 2°C of warming.

All Carbon Literacy courses must consist of a day’s worth (~7-8 hours) of learning– an element of The Carbon Literacy Standard. There is a wealth of evidence which proves that Carbon Literacy training changes people’s behaviour, and enables and motivates them to take action on climate change. It is important for learners to understand the scale of the challenge in the first half of the course, before then learning about the specific and significant actions that they can take in the second half. 1-2 hours or a half day of learning has not been proven to bring about the long-lasting behaviour change which is required of us. Only staff who have completed a day’s worth of approved Carbon Literacy learning and met the accreditation requirements can be certified as Carbon Literate. To fit in with the work schedules of your staff, there are many different ways to deliver Carbon Literacy and training can be delivered over several sessions.

Does The Carbon Literacy Project deliver training?

As the accreditation body, The Carbon Literacy Project doesn't deliver training. Training is delivered in-house by each organisation or can be outsourced to experienced Carbon Literacy trainers or training organisations.

14. Sign up to our Civil Service newsletter and LinkedIn Group

To stay up to date with all our latest news, sign up to our [Civil Service newsletter](#) and join our [LinkedIn Group](#).

15. Want to find out more? Please get in touch

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