



Carbon Literacy at Barnsley College

Barnsley College's commitment to Carbon Literacy has sparked a shift from isolated sustainability efforts to a college-wide cultural transformation, making low-carbon action part of everyday operations.

Their efforts have won the College multiple accolades, cementing it as a sustainability leader within the Further Education sector and within the local community.



The Challenge

- **Fragmented sustainability activity:** Prior to Carbon Literacy, climate action existed in pockets across the College rather than as a unified culture.
- **Local context:** High levels of “green scepticism” in the wider Barnsley region meant climate engagement needed to be accessible, practical, and relevant.
- **Need for whole-organisation buy-in:** A lasting shift required leadership, staff, and students to all play an active role in driving change.

The Solution: Creating a low-carbon culture

Carbon Literacy provided a structured, action-based framework to embed climate understanding into teaching, operations, and leadership.

Before: Isolated initiatives

After: Unified low-carbon culture

- ✓ **Carbon Literacy Action Day (CLAD):** CLAD became the turning point, with College executives funding training for all participating learners. A record **820 learners** were trained, earning the College the **CLAD Catalyst Award**. The momentum continued into a wider environmental awareness week, linked to COP28 Education Day, including carbon footprinting activities, climate cafés, and sustainability-focused engagement events.

Actions: Embedding Carbon Literacy



Staff & student-wide rollout

Carbon Literacy was delivered at scale across departments, embedding shared understanding across the organisation.



Carbon Literacy Ambassadors model

Selected staff were trained as ambassadors and later completed further development with Manchester Metropolitan University to support delivery and expansion.



Staff training integration

Dedicated training days during staff development weeks ensured whole-team participation, with ambassadors delivering sessions internally.



Student pathway development

Staff were supported to become facilitators, enabling Carbon Literacy to be embedded directly into learning programmes and student experience.



Practical engagement tools

Initiatives such as carbon footprinting games, swap shops, and resource-sharing hubs helped translate learning into everyday action.



Governance-level commitment

The Board of Governors became fully Carbon Literate, embedding climate understanding into strategic decision-making across finance and operations.

The Impact: Cultural Transformation & Recognition

Measurable impact



1980+

Carbon Literate staff & students



First ever Gold Carbon Literate Educator

achieved in 2025



5833kg CO₂e

saved through an office supplies-sharing hub



Six sustainability awards

across 2024 and 2025, including three Green Gown Awards

Strategic impact

➤ Student employability

Students are supported to become Carbon Literacy Facilitators and Trainers, developing valuable leadership and workplace skills.

➤ Community influence

The College is working with local partners to extend Carbon Literacy into the wider Barnsley community.

➤ Operational integration

Carbon Literacy now underpins practical initiatives across the College, from resource-sharing schemes to curriculum delivery.

➤ Sector leadership

The College is now a recognised leader within Further Education, demonstrating how Carbon Literacy can drive lasting organisational change.

Future: Scaling impact

1

The newly retrofitted Clean Energy Training Centre (CETC) is training people to install and maintain low-carbon technologies.

2

Pledged to be net-zero by 20245.

3

Expanding student-led Carbon Literacy delivery into the wider community and embedding Carbon Literacy further into curriculum and organisational systems

"Over recent years, Carbon Literacy has become deeply rooted in our culture. Sustainability is no longer seen as the job of a single department – it's something everyone understands, takes responsibility for, and deeply engages with. It's transformed how our staff teach and how our students think – giving them the confidence, knowledge and tools to create change within their own lives and communities."

– David Akeroyd, Principal and CEO, Barnsley College