

Academic event discusses leadership and sustainability at pre-COP 27 event

At an event convened at Panmure House on Tuesday evening, leaders from academia, business, politics and the third sector gathered to discuss the experience of Heriot-Watt University in the delivery of impactful leadership on sustainability in higher and further education.

The event was chaired by **Professor Andrea Nolan**, Principal and Vice Chancellor of Edinburgh Napier University; and addressed by **Professor Richard Williams**, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Heriot-Watt University, and **Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer**, Deputy Principal for Global Sustainability and Director of the Research Centre for Carbon Solutions (RCCS) at Heriot-Watt.

Professor Maroto-Valer is also leading the UK Industrial Decarbonisation Research and Innovation Centre (IDRIC). Powered by research and innovation and funded by UKRI, IDRIC develops innovative decarbonisation solutions at pace and scale in the places where it matters most for the green transformation of the UK's industrial heartlands.

The gathering took place in the run-up to COP27, which meets at Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt from 6-18 November.



Impact Leadership on Sustainability in Further Education: The Heriot Watt Experience at Panmure House , Edinburgh. Pictured L to r Prof Andrea Nolan , Principal & Vice Chancellor, Richard A. Williams, and Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer. Photograph by Martin Shields

Themes discussed were the need to:

- Raise the ambition, confidence and purpose of students and the wider institutional community
- Drive and develop new forms of research funding and green finance partnerships
- Identify methods of expressing institutional pathways to net zero

Welcoming the participants, Professor Nolan said: “A year ago, before COP26, Panmure House was host to the Hutton Series Debates on Climate Change, which provided open discussion around energy, climate change and resource use and

availability, in recognition of the increasing need for reasoned debate between industry, NGOs, government and the public.

“It is timely that ahead of COP27 we are here tonight to engage in further discussion centred on the role of universities and colleges in showing leadership to address climate change, and in particular the nature of leadership in colleges and universities on this most urgent of global issues.”

Addressing the event, Professor Williams said: “Universities and colleges are ‘lighthouses’ in our local and global alumni communities, with a unique opportunity – and responsibility – to show leadership in addressing climate and wider sustainability challenges.”

Professor Williams set out six core ways in which leaders of colleges and universities can show leadership on sustainability and drive progress across society.

They can, he expanded:

- “recalibrate the mood from despair to one of confidence and ambition that we can address climate change challenges;
- “educate our community of staff, students, and alumni to be carbon literate, consumption-aware and understand how we can create a just transition;” catalyse partnerships with external organisations and industry to work on challenging problems together;
- “identify and foster creation of new pathways for research and education funding to yield carbon reduction and global sustainability;
- “take on board some wicked problem areas in our own organisational commitments (eg Scope 3 procurement emissions) to drive change for Scotland;
- “develop a stronger collective national leadership

voice between us to articulate real pathways for going beyond net-zero for our own organisations, and to call for clearer articulations of national level performance from governments and national academies.”

Professor Maroto-Valer said: “Climate crisis is intrinsically an interdisciplinary and intersectional challenge, and therefore our biggest chance to address the climate crisis is by working together. Higher Education needs to show commitment and leadership, and as a collective to act and support the national effort to make headway in this challenging area.”

During her presentation, Professor Maroto-Valer highlighted that Further and Higher Education are already making important contributions through ongoing partnerships to co-develop knowledge and practices for economic and ecological sustainability. She said: “We are working with a wide range of stakeholders in innovation through research contracts, graduate apprentices, partnerships, consortia and via alumni. Decarbonising is a global effort, and we need to draw further from these partnerships to address challenging problems and advance solutions for a sustainable future.”



Impact Leadership on Sustainability in Further Education: The Heriot Watt Experience at Panmure House , Edinburgh. Pictured L to r Prof Andrea Nolan , Principal & Vice Chancellor, Richard A. Williams, and Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer, Photograph by Martin Shields