

Manchester to lead new £8m research centre on equitable low carbon living

Written by Luke

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Following an £8m investment over five years, The University of Manchester is set to lead an innovative centre funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and UKRI as part of its strategic focus on building a green future. The Centre for Joined Up Sustainability Transformations (JUST) will accelerate the understanding of a just transition by coordinating research into action at all levels of society.

Launching in February 2025, the JUST Centre will work closely with communities in five regions of the North of England (West Yorkshire, West Cumbria, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, and Tyneside) while also generating comparative research in other regions of the UK. It will collaborate with partners across local, regional, and national government, business, and civil society to co-produce joined-up solutions to meet climate goals while improving citizens' quality of life.

It will use an innovative mix of data science and participatory methods to research and map existing low-carbon living initiatives and generate evidence about what works where, why, and for whom. This will enable researchers to support better government decision-making and demonstrate to all people and communities the real improvements in quality of life that are possible if we link decarbonisation with regeneration.

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The Centre brings together a team of interdisciplinary social scientists at the Universities of Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Lancaster and Newcastle. The Institute for Community Studies at the not-for-profit organisation [The Young Foundation](#) is the core partner.

Additional partners are Citizens UK, the Local Government Associations for England and Wales, the Scottish Sustainability Network, the British Chambers of Commerce, the NHS Confederation, the Runnymede Trust and the Institute for Government.

Commenting on the announcement, JUST Centre Director and Principal Investigator, Professor Sherilyn MacGregor said: “To meet the challenge of the climate crisis and the UK’s net zero targets, we need to decarbonise our economy and do so quickly, but without leaving whole regions or communities behind. ‘Joined-up’ means bridging the gaps between myriad but presently disconnected, evidence-based interventions and policies focused on sustainability and net zero transitions.

“By connecting sustainability with justice and research with action, the JUST Centre will accelerate the capacity for transformative action towards sustainable futures for all places and communities across the UK.”

ESRC Executive Chair Stian Westlake said: “Our centres carry out interdisciplinary, cutting-edge research in the social sciences that seeks to change the world for the better. They allow ESRC to make sustained investments in strategically important areas, giving researchers the freedom to research topics in depth.

“The climate crisis is one of the most serious challenges the world faces. To successfully transition to a zero-carbon economy, we need to make sure no one is left behind. The JUST Centre will show us how to include everyone as we transform our country and economy, finding new opportunities and putting power in the hands of local communities.”

Stephen Aldridge, Director, Analysis and Data at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), adds: “Net zero poses both huge economic, social, and other challenges and offers no less huge opportunities for the UK - nationally and sub-nationally. To tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities, policymakers and others need evidence – especially evidence on what works and what works most cost-effectively.

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“The Centre for Joined-Up Sustainability Transformations (JUST) is precisely the institutional innovation we need and one I, my team and my department will work closely with across all policy areas. I look forward immensely to engaging with the Centre.”

Professor Paul Monks FRMetS, FRSC, FInstP, Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) said: “Achieving net zero by 2050 requires a wide-reaching transformation of the UK economy and offers an incredible opportunity for jobs, secure energy and growth all across the country. It will improve our health, our quality of life and our overall prosperity. We must support and empower people to participate in the transition. I welcome the establishment of this research centre and its work to ensure a fair, inclusive pathway to net zero.”

For further information visit www.manchester.ac.uk