

Opinion

A just transition for Trinity College

We know well that the University of Cambridge and its constituent colleges — include Trinity — maintain major investments in the fossil-fuel industry. A [recent report](#) from the Cambridge Zero Carbon Society, however, has revealed the extent to which the fossil-fuel industry is variously invested in the University. The report's findings have received national media attention in [The Guardian](#), focusing on the fact that the University accepted a £6 million donation from Shell to fund a team researching oil extraction technology at the same that management is exploring how the University might divest its endowment from fossil-fuel companies. Parallels have been drawn to the [revelation in January](#) that the University kept secret offers of multimillion-pound donations from BP and BHP when it last considered divestment in 2017.

Beyond the University's investments, the report emphasises three elements that help us to understand the entanglement of the fossil-fuel industry with the University's research and decision-making:

1. **Greenwashing** — the report argues that money received from fossil-fuel companies for *named professorships* (BP Professorship of Chemistry, Shell Professor of Chemical Engineering, and Schlumberger Professorship of Complex Physical Systems), *awards and prizes* (The ExxonMobil Prize and BP Chemistry Prizes), *events* (Shell Annual Lecture), and *branded equipment and buildings* (BP Institute) allows such companies to 'portray an image of an industry that is prestigious, charitable and scientifically rigorous'.
2. **Extractive research** — over £18 million in research funding since 2001, including the BP Institute, the CASP research group in the Department of Earth Sciences (which includes Arctic oil exploration), patented technologies that underpin fossil-fuel extraction, Cambridge Enterprise, and Bullard Laboratories in the Department of Earth Sciences.
3. **The revolving door** between the executives of fossil-fuel companies and key University positions, which is reinforced by the 'steady stream' of graduates fed into industry through recruitment events, studentships and scholarships.

The true merit of this report, however, is its application of the framework of a just transition for those within the University who presently depend on the cosy relationship with the fossil-fuel industry. A 'just transition' is defined by the International Trade Union Confederation as a tool 'aimed at smoothing the shift towards a more sustainable society and providing hope for the capacity of a green economy to sustain decent jobs and livelihoods for all'. Zero Carbon's report explains that 'just transition to a sustainable economy must be a collective endeavour supported by the University itself, as well as all colleges and departments' and that the University should 'cut ties with the fossil fuel industry without harming learning, teaching, or research conditions'.

Trinity's Climate Change Working Group, set up recently by the College Council and composed largely of Fellows, provides a platform to explore how we will make a just transition to becoming a world-class institution in a low-carbon economy. In promoting responsible divestment, we cannot lose sight of that imperative.

The good

[Energy majors eye swifter shift to green](#)

[Divestment pledge pays off](#)
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[When fast fashion jumps on the eco-wagon](#)

The bad

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[Delhi declares air pollution emergency](#)
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The interesting

[Robert Friedland, China and the rush for copper in the DRC](#)
[How climate change will reshape geopolitics](#)
[Glencore backs \\$5.8bn cash call at DRC subsidiary](#)
[Central bankers are not climatologists](#)
[Barrick Gold chief eyes growth in 'strategic' copper](#)
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[US shale to swamp Opec supplies over next five years](#)
[Practicalities limit hopes for 'green QE' from ECB](#)
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[US specialty coffee trader acquires failed UK sustainability coffee pioneer](#)
[ExxonMobil warns a US fracking ban would lift oil price](#)
[Net-zero world must conquer fear of nuclear power](#)
[Fracking U-turn highlights risk of politicising energy](#)
[Fires force Californians to face changing landscape](#)
[GenX will set central banks' climate response](#)
[Fracking ban: electioneering or geology?](#)
[There is one way forward on climate change](#)

Cambridge news

[Hundreds of protestors march through Cambridge in climate change rally](#)
[Hypocrisy claim over Cambridge's long-haul flights](#)
['Generation nepocide' unites to stage XR blood protest in Cambridge](#)
[Cambridge accepts £6m Shell donation for oil extraction research](#)
[Shell Gives Cambridge Millions to Research Oil Extraction](#)
[Cambridge University accused of climate change hypocrisy](#)
['Messy' production of perovskite material increases solar cell efficiency](#)
[Opinion: Climate change, pandemics, biodiversity loss – no country is sufficiently prepared](#)
[Two new Climate Change Master's programmes launched at Cambridge](#)
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