

The Planetary Health Report Card

How students are advocating for the inclusion of climate action and sustainability within medical education



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Identifying the gap

Currently, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, inclusion of Education for Sustainable Health is insufficient. In 2020, only 15% of medical schools across 112 countries delivered teaching on climate change and it is unknown as to the depth and methods as to which these were being taught. To fill this gap, the Planetary Health Report Card (PHRC) was developed to evaluate medical school engagement in planetary health and sustainability.

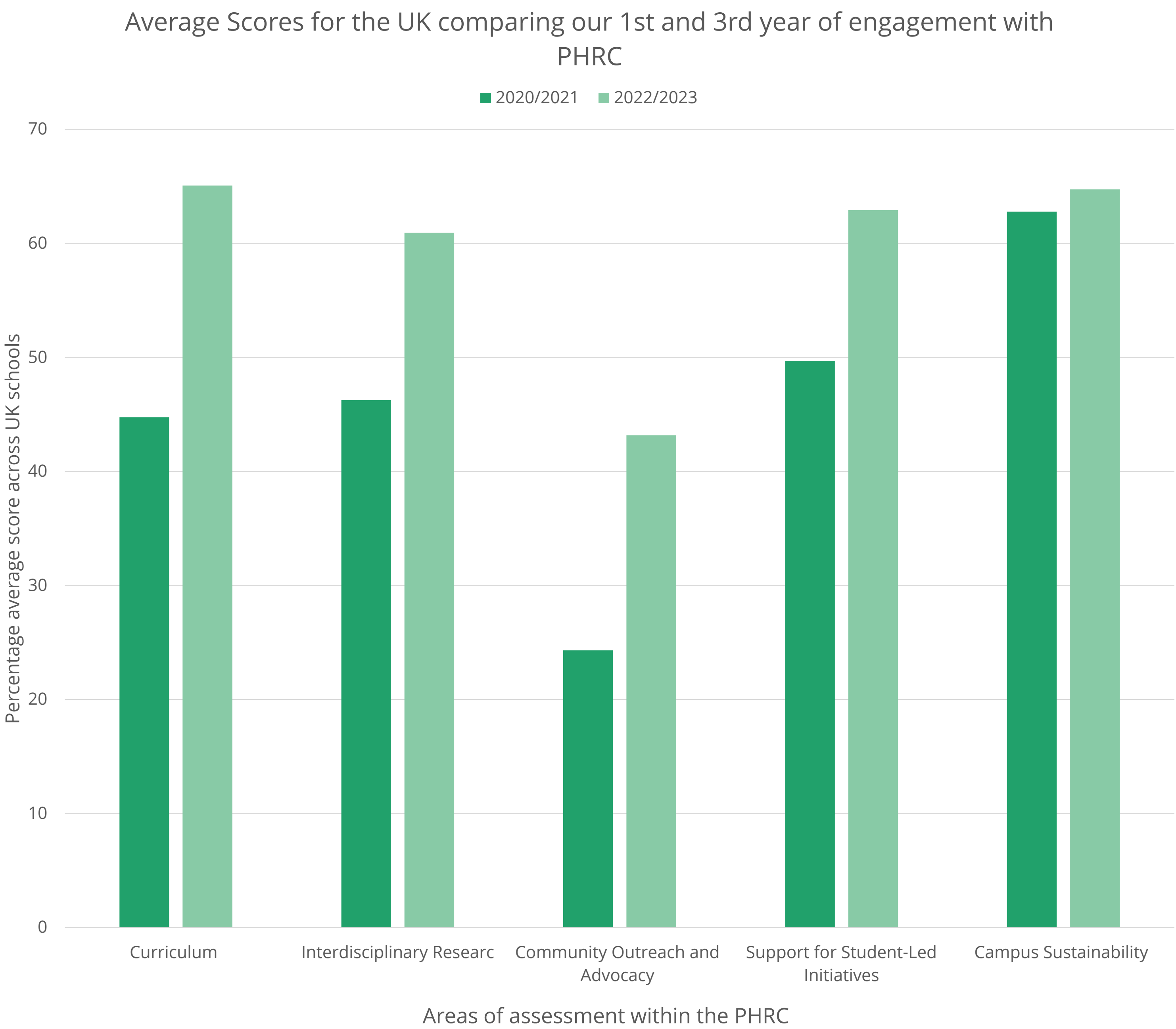
What is the PHRC?

The PHRC is a student-led initiative originally founded in 2019 and is a metric-based tool for evaluating and improving planetary health content in health professional schools. At each participating institution, student-led, faculty-mentored teams fill out the report card, identifying opportunities for improvement and reaching out to relevant staff and faculty along the way. The report cards produced assesses medical schools in five key areas: curriculum, research, community outreach and advocacy, support for student-led initiatives and campus sustainability. Each area is measured using standardised metrics, scored on a multilevel point system, ranging from a maximum of 2 to 3 points, producing a score for each of the 5 areas. The analysis is completed by students studying at each of the institutions with the support of staff and faculty and is then further analysed by a member of the international committee. With every completed cycle, schools can monitor progress and strive to improve their score and ranking with each coming year. Examples of best practice and novel ideas for implementation of planetary health education are collated in an international summary report that allows collaboration and learning from health professional schools all over the world.

Since its creation, the PHRC has expanded rapidly to evaluate over 100 medical schools in 11 nations, with the fourth annual cycle of evaluation recently published. Though the initiative was developed by medical students to evaluate medical schools, adaptations of the PHRC for nursing and pharmacy training programs have recently been piloted.

Process in the UK over the last three years

In 2020-2021, 31 schools completed a report card, followed by 26 in 2021-2022 and 25 in 2022-2023. Of the 20 schools that have completed reports in both 21/22 and 22/23, all 20 schools improved their overall score across all 5 areas, with an average improvement of 6.8%. 18 schools have completed three consecutive reports and have made an average improvement of 13.8% across all areas. The average curriculum score made the most improvement and has increased by 20.3% over two years, representative of student-led advocacy and the work of other advocates of Education for Sustainable Health.



Participants have reported the report card is driving the development of new sustainable healthcare elective modules and core curriculum content, student sustainability positions on curriculum development committees, new dedicated sustainability web pages or regular communications on sustainable healthcare, new community partnerships promoting climate change and health education and many more.

Challenges

Some schools initially faced some challenges in gaining support from faculty however other schools have reported that their school is supportive and has been engaged in making improvements. Turnover in student-led teams has been a challenge, however 25/31 of the schools in the UK who initially participated are still contributing. With some schools now having participated for three years, our aim for the coming academic year is to support students in taking the report cards and acting on the identified deficits. We hope to achieve this through curriculum development workshops and partnership with Climate Resources for Health Education, an open access peer-reviewed repository of climate and health materials for implementation.

Sustainability of the project

In terms of long-term sustainability, this initiative has been running for 3 years in the UK however has been running for 4 years total. The numbers of schools completing report cards have been pretty consistent over the last 3 years which will hopefully continue into the 2023/2024 report card. More schools internationally have joined every year, increasing from 13 schools initially to 96 schools this year. New countries such as New Zealand and South Africa have also joined the initiative. Given the success of the medicine report card, report cards for other healthcare professional programmes such as physiotherapy are being developed and trialled.