

Carbon Literacy for Libraries Shareable Course

Laragh Quinney

Programme Lead Climate Action Plan, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland, l.quinney@nls.uk

Alison Stevenson

Director of Collections, Access and Research, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland, a.stevenson@nls.uk



Copyright © 2026 by Laragh Quinney and Alison Stevenson. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract:

The National Library of Scotland led a project to develop the Carbon Literacy for Libraries Shareable Course. This course is designed to provide library and information professionals with a comprehensive introduction to the climate crisis. It aims to empower librarians to take action to cut greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable communities.

The course is validated by the Carbon Literacy Project. This charity was set up in 2013 to help organisations, community groups and individuals understand the climate crisis and the actions they can take to support the move to Net Zero. Learners attending the course submit an evidence form to the Carbon Literacy Project to be certified as carbon literate. On this form they commit to taking two actions to reduce carbon emissions.

The course includes:

- An introduction to climate science
- The impact of climate change
- UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Climate justice
- National and international policies
- Calculating carbon footprints for organisations and individuals
- Taking action to reduce carbon emissions

The course celebrates the many ways libraries can support sustainable communities. A wide range of case studies showcase good practice by libraries in

the UK and Ireland. Learners also receive a resources pack to support further action.

The National Library of Scotland began cascading this training in autumn 2024. Over 200 librarians have been certified as carbon literate and over 400 actions pledged. Learners were contacted after six months to review the impact of the course and report on progress towards their actions. All learners agreed or strongly agreed that attending the course had encouraged them to take sustainable action at work. The Library continues to support the development and delivery of this course.

Keywords: Training Climate Literacy Libraries Sustainability

The Carbon Literacy for Libraries Shareable Course, developed by the National Library of Scotland, aims to give library and information professionals a practical, sector-relevant understanding of the climate crisis. It is designed to empower action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable communities.

The wider Carbon Literacy Project was founded in 2013. It seeks to support the transition to a net-zero society by engaging with as many organisations, community groups and individuals as possible. Carbon Literacy is defined as “An awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities, and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis.” (Carbon Literacy Project, 2026a)

Carbon Literacy training is a day’s worth of learning. It is designed to be an interactive learning experience, encouraging learners to share their ideas and consider how to embed sustainability into their personal and professional life. All carbon literacy courses include the same core elements but can be tailored to the concerns of specific sectors. At the end of the course learners are required to commit to taking two carbon-reducing actions before being certified. The project has grown internationally, with more than 160,000 certified learners across 48 nations. All new carbon literacy courses need to be submitted to the Carbon Literacy Project for validation, to ensure a consistent standard is maintained.

The National Library of Scotland developed a Climate Action Plan for the library in 2021, which identified the need for climate training for library staff. A carbon literacy training session was delivered in 2023 using the closest existing course, Carbon Literacy for Museums. Although it was a successful day, participants noted that the course did not reflect how sustainable libraries are as a model and how well placed they are to support sustainable communities. Developing a library specific course was identified as a practical way to support librarians to engage with the climate crisis and to share examples of good practice by libraries in the UK and Ireland.

The National Library of Scotland submitted a successful bid to the CILIPS Research Fund (CILIPS, undated) to develop a Carbon Literacy for Libraries course. To ensure the new course would have relevance across the library sector, they were supported

by a volunteer project team of librarians working in the public, academic, health and specialist library sectors. The National Library of Scotland also contacted a diverse range of libraries in the UK and Ireland to develop case studies showcasing sustainable action by libraries. Topics covered by these case studies include library buildings, transport, procurement, library events, library gardens, exhibitions, digital footprints and collection development.

The resulting course was adapted from the Carbon Literacy for Museums Toolkit and validated in summer 2024. It has four modules covering: climate science, the impact of climate change, National and International policies, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, climate justice, the role of libraries, calculating carbon footprints, communicating climate stories and ideas for green action. It includes more than 30 library case studies and frequent activities to encourage discussion and knowledge sharing by learners. A resources handbook is provided to learners.

The course is designed to be flexible and shareable. It can be delivered online or in person, and can run as one full day, two half-days or four separate modules. Trainers can select from the case studies to suit each group of learners and add local examples. Certified learners can opt to become facilitators and help cascade the training through their own organisations. Libraries can also choose to employ a professional trainer to deliver the course materials to their staff.

The core aim of this training is to empower learners to take action to help cut greenhouse gas emissions. At the end of the course, learners are asked to commit to taking two actions. An individual action, which should be an action the learner can complete themselves. A group action, which they would work on with others. Actions must be new, significant to the learner and relevant to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Actions should also be achievable, so that learners are able to complete their tasks and gain the confidence to build towards larger projects.

A wide range of actions have been pledged by learners. These include actions to reduce emissions from travel, procurement, energy use, library buildings or waste. Librarians can also commit to actions that focus on widening knowledge and supporting sustainable communities. These might take the form of service development, library events, displays and exhibitions, collection development, community partnerships or cascading training.

Since September 2024, the National Library of Scotland has directly delivered thirteen training sessions and shared the course materials with fourteen other organisations and trainers. By June 2026, 284 librarians had successfully completed the course and been certified as carbon literate.

To assess the impact of attending training, the National Library of Scotland contacts learners six months after completing the course with a short questionnaire. A response was received from approximately half of those contacted. All respondents agreed that they had discussed the course and what they had learned with colleagues and they would recommend the course to their colleagues. All learners

stated that completing the course had made them more confident in taking sustainable action at work.

Learners were also asked about progress towards their pledged actions. For the individual action, 37% reported their action as complete. Another 33% reported that they were either currently working on their action or had partially completed the action. Of the remaining respondents, 23% indicated that they still intended to complete their action.

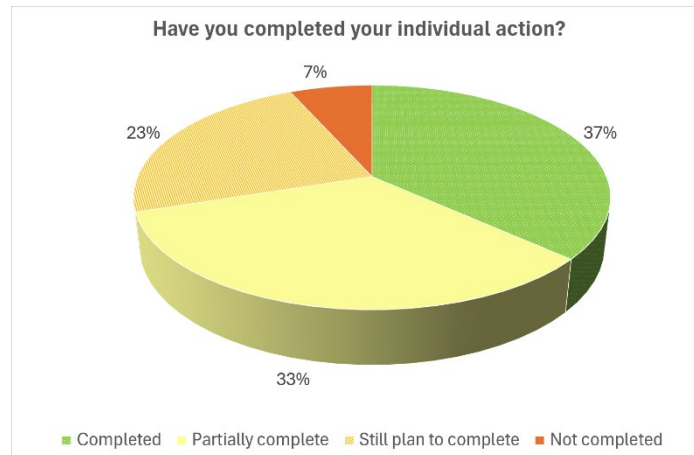


Figure 1 Completion of individual action

For the group action, 30% of respondents reported their action as complete, while 53% stated that they were either currently working on this action or had partially completed it. All remaining respondents said they still intended to complete their action.



Figure 2 Completion of group action

It is likely that a higher proportion of respondents reported that they were still working on their group action due to the need to engage partners before the project could commence.

The National Library of Scotland continues to support the development and delivery of the Carbon Literacy for Libraries Course. Course materials are reviewed and updated annually to ensure continued relevancy. Libraries in the UK and Ireland looking to offer this training to their staff can obtain the course materials from the National Library of Scotland to deliver in-house or employ a carbon literate trainer to deliver the course.

The current course is approved for delivery in the UK and Ireland. The National Library of Scotland would be pleased to share the course materials with any libraries wishing to create a version of the course for another country. Any new carbon literacy course would need to be submitted for validation to the Carbon Literacy Project. Details of how to submit a course for validation and the costs involved are detailed on their website. (Carbon Literacy Project, 2026b)

References

Carbon Literacy Project (2026) *The Carbon Literacy Project*.
<https://carbonliteracy.com/> (Accessed 16/6/26)

Carbon Literacy Project (2026b) *Resources* <https://carbonliteracy.com/trainer-hub/resource-library/> (Accessed 16/6/26)

CILIPS (undated) *CILIPS Research Fund* <https://www.cilips.org.uk/cilips-research-fund/> (Accessed 18/6/26)