





**'Systems  
change, not  
climate  
change.'**

- Greta Thunberg

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Does dim byd tebyg i Goleg y Mynydd Du: coleg a sefydlwyd fel ymateb uniongyrchol i'r newidiadau trawsnewidiol sy'n digwydd i'n hinsawdd, ein hecosystemau ac i ni fel bodau dynol sy'n byw fel rhan ohonyn nhw. Rydyn ni'n ymroddedig i'ch grymuso i ddatblygu sgiliau perthnasol ac angenrheidiol i greu newid mewn systemau gydag eraill, mewn ymateb i'r angen am weithredu ar yr hinsawdd ac addasu, beth bynnag fo'ch cefndir neu ddoniau a pha bynnag yrfa y byddwch chi'n ei dilyn.

Mae Coleg y Mynydd Du yn agored i bawb. Ymunwch â ni a helpwch ni i arloesi gyda dyfodol mwy cynaliadwy. Mae chwalfa'r hinsawdd yn effeithio ar bob sector o gymdeithasau ac economïau'r byd a does dim modd mynd i'r afael â hi drwy gyfrwng un pwnc yn unig. Dyna pam mae ein rhaglen arloesol yn cynnwys gradd sengl – BA (Anrh) Dyfodol Cynaliadwy: Y Celfyddydau, Ecoleg a Newid Systemau, gyda llwybrau dewisol i'ch galluogi i lunio eich taith ddysgu eich hun. O'r celfyddydau i agroecoleg ac o niwrowyddoniaeth i ymagweddau newydd at economeg.

Mae'r BA (Anrh) Dyfodol Cynaliadwy: Celfyddydau, Ecoleg a Newid Systemau yn cyfuno mewnwelediadau o'r celfyddydau a'r gwyddorau, yr economi wleidyddol, ac ymarfer creadigol a phroffesiynol, gyda chyfleoedd i ddysgu mewn gwahanol lefydd a lleoliadau proffesiynol ym Mannau Brycheiniog.

Mae'r rhaglen wedi'i dylunio mewn partneriaeth â Phrifysgol Metropolitan Caerdydd, ac mae'n canolbwyntio ar fynd i'r afael â newidiadau byd go iawn yn ymarferol ac yn gyfannol.

Mae Coleg y Mynydd Du yn sefydliad Cymreig balch, ac mae ein gradd wedi'i llywio gan y Gymraeg a'i diwylliant, yr amgylchedd hanesyddol, ac enw da Cymru fel arloeswr o ran cynaliadwyedd. Byddwch yn dysgu yng nghanol byd natur a'r parc cenedlaethol yng nghymuned Talgarth.

Rydyn ni'n falch iawn eich bod chi'n ystyried ymuno â ni yma yng Ngholeg y Mynydd Du. Edrychwn ymlaen at eich helpu i ryddhau'ch potensial i adeiladu dyfodol mwy cynaliadwy.

There is nothing quite like Black Mountains College: a college founded as a direct response to the transformative changes that are happening to our climate, our ecosystems and to us as humans who live as part of them. We are dedicated to empowering you to develop relevant and necessary skills to create systems change with others, in response to the need for climate action and adaptation, whatever your background or talents and whichever career you pursue.

Black Mountains College is open to all. Join us and help pioneer more sustainable futures. Climate breakdown affects all sectors of societies and economies and cannot be addressed through the lens of one subject. That is why our innovative programme consists of a single degree – BA (Hons) Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology and Systems Change, with optional pathways to allow you to shape your own learning journey. From the arts to agroecology, from neuroscience to new approaches to economics.

BA (Hons) Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology and Systems Change combines insights from arts and sciences, political economy, and creative and professional practice, with opportunities to learn at different venues and professional placements in the Bannau Brycheiniog.

The programme has been designed in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University, and focuses on addressing real-world changes practically and holistically.

Black Mountains College is a proudly Welsh institution, and our degree is informed by the Welsh language and culture, historic environment, and Wales's reputation as a trailblazer on sustainability. You'll be learning in nature and in the community of Talgarth in the heart of the national park.

We are delighted that you are considering joining us here at Black Mountains College. We can't wait to help you unleash your potential to build more sustainable futures.

Ben Rawlence

# Why Choose Black Mountains College?

## **Accessibility - Open Admissions Policy**

At Black Mountains College, we are committed to reducing barriers to entry and building relationships with a wide range of organisations. Black Mountains College has an open admissions policy designed to encourage the widest possible access and participation for those that would like to enter higher education. Admission is based on portfolios and interviews, not grades alone. We look for potential to make change happen, rather than prior achievement.

## **One Degree - A Unique Learning Model**

Black Mountains College offers a single undergraduate degree programme designed to help you learn the interdisciplinary skills you need – across arts, ecology, and the application of technology – to understand and create meaningful change.

Our single degree programme BA(Hons) Sustainable Futures also offers an innovative approach to study, centred around these questions:

Year 1: How can we learn in a changing world?

Year 2: How can we address some of the world's most urgent challenges?

Year 3: Devise your own question to structure your studies and your engagement with real-world challenges.

Our programme invites you to develop the 'futures-making skills' necessary for making sense of a rapidly changing world: critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and compassion. We help you find your talents and then apply them in service of a more equitable world within planetary limits. This involves practical skills and arts-based training in creativity and design thinking alongside traditional activities such as critical reading and academic writing, scientific experiments, and theory.

Classes are three days a week in intensive 'blocks' in year one, meaning you study one topic at a time. This gives you the chance to really delve deeply into an area. We focus on teaching excellence above all else. Teaching is research-informed and led by experts in the topics you are studying. All our teaching staff are passionate about their subjects and the radical approach of Black Mountains College.

Because we know that students learn best in small groups, our seminars are capped at 20 students.







# Nature as the Classroom

Studies have shown that learning outdoors in nature correlates with enhanced wellbeing, concentration, memory, and confidence – and reconnection to nature begins with making nature itself the classroom. At Black Mountains College you will connect with nature through learning outdoors in the spectacular Bannau Brycheiniog.



You will have a truly unique and inspirational learning experience in beautiful locations. We teach in a mix of settings – classrooms, workshops and outdoors.

You will also develop skills to enact positive and sustainable systems change through real-world problem-based learning projects in social, business and community settings.

In this way you will develop a robust set of academic and practical skills that will enable you to succeed and really make a lasting difference in a wide range of careers.

## Recognised Partnerships

Our programme has been developed in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University. Black Mountains College students are also students of Cardiff Metropolitan University and so you will have access to additional resources provided by the University.





‘Students around the world are calling on schools and universities to ‘teach the future’—and they must. But it is the moral responsibility of a proper education system not just to tell students the truth about the climate and ecological emergency but to prepare them for it. Putting that responsibility into practice is the animating idea behind Black Mountains College.’

– Education as if People and Planet Matter – Natalia Ernstman and Ben Rawlence

Not all classrooms have walls.



‘Our role is not to limit the choices available to future generations, but to bequeath to them as many possibilities as we can.’

- Alex Steffen

# Where will I learn?

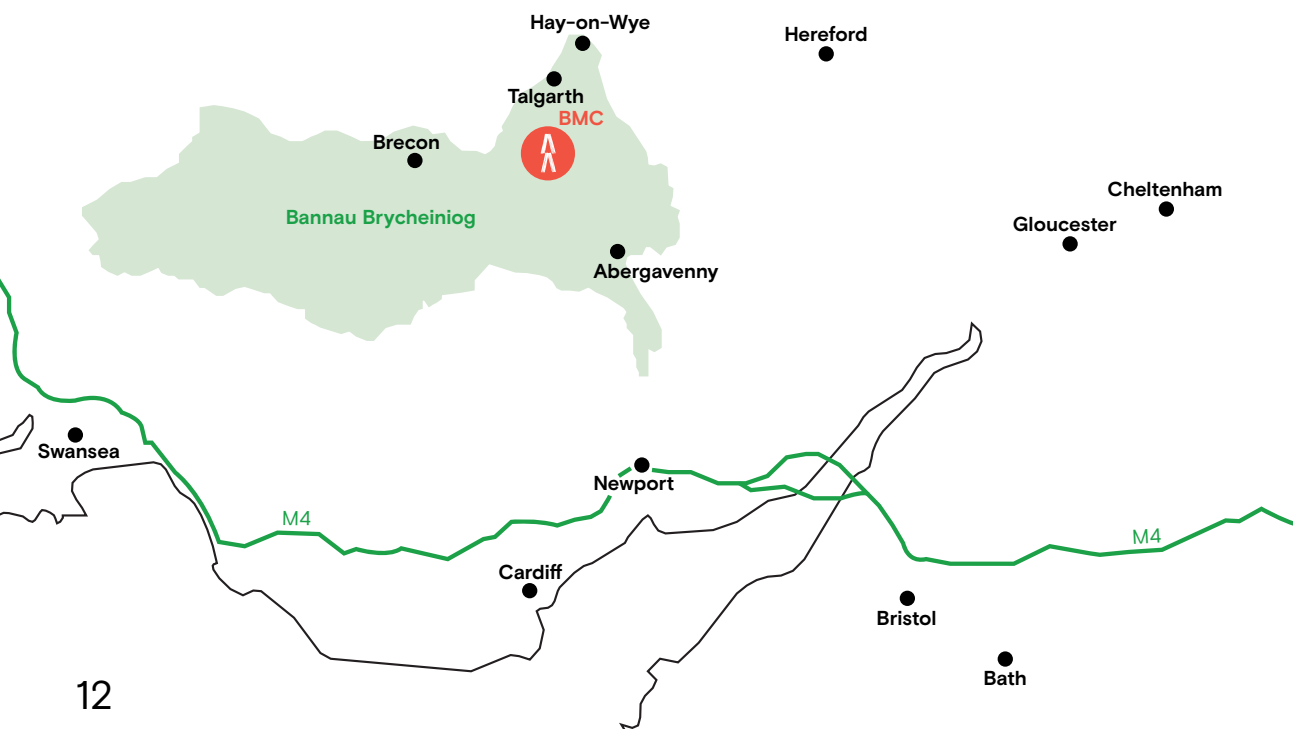
Our campus is located in and around the Bannau Brycheiniog. You will learn outside in nature, and inside in unique and inspirational settings.

## Our main sites for learning and teaching are:

Our 120-acre farm campus, Troed yr Harn, is also an experimental nature recovery project, transforming former upland grazing into regenerated woodland, organic orchards, horticulture, and agro-ecological nature-friendly farming.

Lectures, seminars and workshops will take place at the farm and in a learning space in Talgarth. From September 2025, lessons will take place in the former Youth Community Centre that is currently undergoing a £1.7million cutting-edge retrofit.

You will also benefit from experiential learning in the natural and historic environment of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park.



51°58'57.1"N 3°12'49.0"W

what3words:  
something.enlighten.just

## Troed yr Harn





# Student Life



## Accommodation

Where you live is just as important as how you live, so we currently have several options to help make your immersive learning experience 'all-in'. You will have the option to:

- Rent a room in shared/self-contained student accommodation, or in our shared farmhouse
- 'Home-stay' with carefully selected hosts in the local community
- Park your own camper van at a caravan site nearby



For more information about your accommodation choices, please visit: [blackmountainscollege.uk/accommodation](https://blackmountainscollege.uk/accommodation)



# Student Experience

Black Mountains College is a unique educational centre that is committed to creating meaningful change.

You will join like-minded students and staff who will also bring new ideas to challenge and develop your thinking.

The college is set within its context; we are part of the community of Talgarth in the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, both of which offer a range of opportunities for you to learn and explore. Your study experience will be enhanced through field trips and visits to ecologically important and groundbreaking projects.

Of course, it's not all about study! The area offers a host of sports and other outdoor activities, as well as great pubs, cafes and cultural centres.

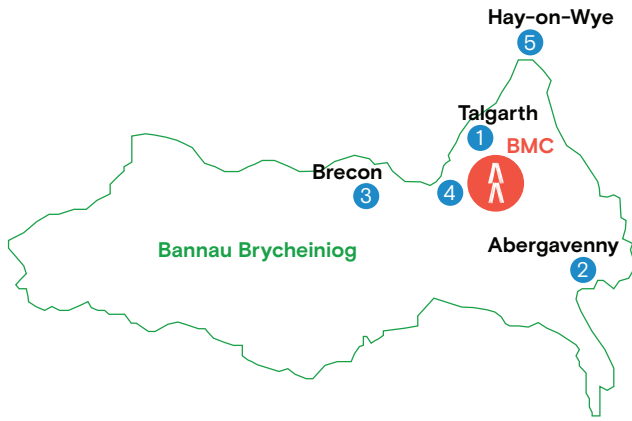
For example:

- Talgarth is home to Gwernyfed Rugby Club <sup>1</sup> a well-respected rugby club with opportunities to play at all levels
- There are leisure centres in Abergavenny <sup>2</sup> and Brecon <sup>3</sup> which have clubs for football, netball, gymnastics, swimming, gyms, badminton, hockey, cricket, tennis, judo, yoga, and many more
- Opportunities for canoeing, mountaineering, horse riding, hiking, biking and wild swimming are available across Bannau Brycheiniog
- There are also allotments, rural crafts, beekeeping, baking, woodland management, foraging, arts, film, museums etc.

One of the largest climbing walls in South Wales is at the nearby Llangors Activity Centre: [activityuk.com](http://activityuk.com) <sup>4</sup>.

Theatr Brycheiniog is the local theatre in Brecon <sup>3</sup> and hosts a wide range of plays, talks and concerts. The Coliseum Cinema is also based in Brecon and Hay Bookshop Cinema is in Hay-on-Wye <sup>5</sup>.





Check out what our partners at Penpont are up to:  
[actionforconservation.org/penpont](https://actionforconservation.org/penpont)

And see the amazing work being done by Stump Up For Trees:  
[stumpupfortrees.org](https://stumpupfortrees.org)

Our students have the opportunity to participate in the citizen science monitoring of the River Wye: [fouw.org.uk](https://fouw.org.uk)



The Black Mountains is home to some of the best festivals in the UK, and these include:

- The Hay Festival for books and literature twice a year
- Abergavenny Food Festival
- How the Light Gets In Festival of Ideas
- Brecon Jazz





# Student Society

The Student Society is where you can seek representation, meet new friends, socialise, seek employment, and have your voice heard.

Our Student Society is actively involved in the governance of the College as well as in coordinating student activities, parties, and trips. Black Mountains College is a partner of Cardiff Metropolitan University and that means you will be a member of the University's Student Union, either online, at the University or via our Black Mountains College Student Society.

Services offered by Cardiff Metropolitan University Students' Union include:

- Advice and representation
- UMAX with its job shop and training and development
- All the SU Sports clubs and societies

The BMC Student Society encourages every student to participate in the Society and share in the democratic governance of the college. Students come to BMC because they care about the world around them and there are many opportunities for students to get involved in community activities, land use planning, growing food, admissions processes and mentoring of other students.

# Student Support

Our Student Support services team can help with a wide variety of aspects of student life, whether these are related to your studies, your career aspirations, or something more personal.

You will be part of a small and friendly community, where staff and students work together to learn, develop your skills and resilience, and help you achieve your personal ambitions.

The College has many avenues of support which include:

- Careers advice and guidance about progression
- Personal tutoring
- Financial advice and hardship support
- Accommodation support
- Wellbeing/counselling/health advice
- Language study support
- Accessibility services – This includes learning support and disabled students allowance (DSA). Additional Learner Needs (ALN) are identified at the point of the interview during the application stage, and prior to enrolment adjustments are discussed.

Throughout your course, you can receive support and guidance from Black Mountains College Student Services, your personal tutor, or a counsellor.

A Black Mountains College student is also a Cardiff Metropolitan University student, and our students also have the opportunity to engage with the University's full range of student services.

## **Our Facilities**

Here at Black Mountains College, our wonderful study locations speak for themselves, and we also have a range of facilities to enhance your learning experience. For example:

### **IT**

We aim to ensure all students have access to a laptop if they need it. All of our sites have high-speed internet, and we have printers available for student use.

## Library services

We have a small subject-specific library and you'll have access to the Talgarth, Brecon and Hay-on-Wye public libraries where you can access inter-library loan facilities.

You'll also have access to a wide range of physical and online resources at Cardiff Metropolitan University. You are entitled to full access to the University's electronic resources. These include a range of guidance on academic skills, access to over 30,000 e-journals and 4,500 e-books.

For more information please visit:

[cardiffmet.ac.uk/study/studentservices/](http://cardiffmet.ac.uk/study/studentservices/)



'I love the vast range of thought-systems, theories, and practices that we both study and enact. The interdisciplinary lens that we apply in class provides a holistic and in-depth approach to anthropological, economic, artistic, philosophical, literary, and ecological subjects.'

Tutor support is regular, and checkups are constant throughout the year, focusing on both mental and academic wellbeing and providing support for extracurricular activities. I would recommend BMC because of its ability to both adapt and develop based on the student body.' – Josie Kalwij, BA (Hons) Sustainable Futures first year student



**'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.'**

– Aldo Leopold

More about the BA (Hons)

# Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology, and Systems Change

Black Mountains College

**The BA (Hons) Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology, and Systems Change** is an interdisciplinary degree, combining a grounding in theories of change, creative practice based on artistic methods, ecological thinking, political economy and sociotechnical systems.

Our degree has been carefully designed to enable you to graduate with the problem solving skills and resilience needed to succeed in careers where you can make a real difference to the futures of both people and planet. You will be taught by experienced lecturers and your learning will be enriched by inspirational speakers at the forefront of their fields.

The foundation of the BA is learning how to learn about the natural world and human societies in order to become an agent of change. Our aim is to foster confidence, creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. We aim to equip you with the ability to communicate, collaborate, imagine and deliver far-reaching changes to current systems.



# Why study the BA (Hons) Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology and Systems Change?

- **Futures thinking and action** – Our degree addresses the main question ‘how can we build our collective capacity to deal with challenging and unknown futures?’
- **Sustainability** – the task of re-engineering society within planetary limits requires all the creativity and ingenuity humans can muster.
- **Practical and theoretical** – Our programme addresses real-world challenges practically and holistically, combining insights from a wide range of disciplines and professional practices about how humans learn and how change happens.
- **Relevant and recognised** – the Welsh Government’s Well-being of Future Generations Act has recently brought international attention to Wales. It provides the ‘ambition, permission and legal obligation to improve our social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being’  
Check out: [futuregenerations.wales/](https://futuregenerations.wales/)
- **World ready** – Our degree isn’t just to help you understand how we can better meet the needs of society, but to also prepare you for a career in that changing context. With an integrated work placement or civic engagement project, you’ll be able to practically apply your learning and experience in the real world.





‘Confronting the reality of the state of our climate and the scale of the changes required can be daunting. To make a new story also means critically understanding the old one: how we got to this point, how we’d like things to be different, and what levers we have to change things.’

– Ben Rawlence and Dr. Natalia Eernstman

Our undergraduate curriculum does not contain modules defined by subjects such as ‘geography’ or ‘physics’ but instead focuses on questions such as ‘how can we imagine the future?’ and ‘what does change look like in practice?’ Answering these questions touches on concepts of compassion, empathy and an openness to revisionist histories of colonialism and capitalism to understand how we got to this point and what we need to do to build better systems.





**The first year** of your three-year programme focuses on the question:  
**How can we learn in a changing world?**

You will learn about how humans have impacted the earth and nature historically and imagine alternative futures.

You will gain a grounding in earth systems, climate and ecology. You will also develop your knowledge of how we learn, using all our senses, and apply this to deepen your understanding of your own strengths and interests.

The first year is composed of six mandatory modules in three areas:

- **Systems Change**
- **Learning How To Learn**
- **Creative Practice**

**Year 2** focuses on the question: **How can we address some of the world's most urgent challenges?**

In this year you will consolidate the learning from year one and start to build your specialisms in context and practice. There will be an emphasis on leadership and design thinking skills, so you can problem-solve and strategise, individually and with others, to find creative solutions to large-scale challenges.

In addition to the mandatory modules, you will choose one option from:

- **Agroecology for Food System Transformation**
- **Sociotechnical Systems for Future Generations**
- **Creative Practice for Future Generations**

**Year 3** is structured around a **question of your choice**, arising out of your studies in Years 1 and 2, and the specialisms you have chosen in Year 2.

You will pursue your question through an Individual Research Project and in a module that allows you to undertake a work placement, civic engagement project or create a new venture in a related field. The module 'What Next? Global and Local Systems Change', will help you frame your aspirations after graduation within the context of global and local developments, and to develop a portfolio (including a CV, social media profile, presentation skills and introduction to relevant networks) that will prepare you for life after your degree.

### Term 1 (Sep - Jan)

Level 4	How Can We Learn the Skills We Need Today? (20 cp)	How Can We Understand The Past? (20 cp)	Creative Practice 1 (20 cp)
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Level 5	How Can We Imagine the Future? (20 cp)		
	Systems Change 2: Practice and Methods (20 cp)		
	Creative Practice 3 (20 cp)		

Level 6	Global and Local Systems Change (40 cp)		
	Change In Practice 3 (40 cp)		

Our degree will enable you to develop the creative and problem-solving skills you need to prepare for future careers and new ways of living and working, many of which may not yet exist. It'll prepare you to play a role in the struggle to imagine and enact transformational change to ensure a world fit for future generations.

## Timetable

### Term 2 (Jan - Jun)

Systems Change 1  
Frameworks & Methods  
(20 cp)

Creative Practice 2  
(20 cp)

Change in Practice 1  
(20 cp)

### Optional Modules

Agroecology for Food System Transformation (20 cp)

Sociotechnical Systems for Future Generations (20 cp)

Creative Practices for Futures Generations (20 cp)

Designing for the Future (20 cp)

Change in Practice 2 (20 cp)

Individual Research Project (40 cp)

# Careers and Progression

Our degree will support you in your career or further study choices. Black Mountains College students will graduate with a respected interdisciplinary degree, work experience and evidence of impact, having already changed the world a little, and that's a big deal.

The degree is structured with three 'change in practice' modules at each level allowing you to progressively apply what you're learning in real world settings, culminating in a year-long industry placement and project in year three.

Each student is assigned a personal tutor who will advise on careers and future plans. We have a dedicated Student Support team who can provide additional guidance, and of course, you will have access to Cardiff Metropolitan University's careers service.

Here are some of the employers who've expressed an interest in hosting Black Mountains College students for challenges and placements:



Black Mountains College regularly hosts an online global Climate Careers Fair where our students and young people from around the world collectively explore with employers in different sectors how the world of work is being impacted by the transformation of earth systems.

Former Climate Careers Fair participants include:



## What can I do with a BMC Degree?

Black Mountains College Graduates will have developed skills in:

- Critical thinking
- Communication
- Creativity
- Research
- Project planning
- Evaluation

These skills are highly valued and relevant in any sector you choose to work.

Whether you progress to employment or further study, our degree will prepare you effectively for a rapidly changing world. All sectors will be reshaped in the coming years. Many corporate and public sector bodies are employing ‘climate officers’ and ‘sustainability’ teams – in some sectors, climate reporting is becoming a legal requirement. Our degree will prepare graduates well for a future career in research and academia.

Example pathways include:

- Agriculture, conservation and land-based industries
- Industries reshaped by climate change in the coming decades (which is nearly all)
- Roles in politics, the media, charity, the voluntary sector, and international relations in which an understanding of systems change will be essential to shape future policy
- The Arts for social change

As a ground-breaking new institution Black Mountains College has a wide network of supporters, experts and professionals in many countries and across many sectors keen to assist future generations in making a difference. As a pioneer at Black Mountains College you will have access to this informal and personal network.

### Alumni

When you graduate, you will become an alumnus of both Black Mountains College and Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Further study options are also available at Cardiff Metropolitan University. For more information about your career and further study options, please visit: [blackmountainscollege.co.uk/careers](https://blackmountainscollege.co.uk/careers)



# Is the Black Mountains College Degree for Me?

There is no typical student at Black Mountains College and the programme has been designed with a wide range of students in mind. We are looking for students who have strong reasons for wanting to study in the environment at Black Mountains College and who are motivated to change the world.

As the programme is new, we have spent some time imagining our initial cohorts\*, and designing the programme so it will appeal to them – and to make it as accessible as possible.

## Stewart



Stewart is 18 and grew up on a farm near Talgarth. His Dad and several generations before him were farmers. Stewart has been working on the farm since leaving school but is feeling restless. He never considered going to university before. He did quite well at school, but found some of it boring. Stewart is conflicted about whether he wants to take over the farm, when his father retires, and so is looking for a degree where he can consider other options, but also learn things that will be useful if he does stay on.

### What happens next?

Stewart studies on the degree part-time for 2 years, alongside work on the family farm, so he can develop skills relevant to taking over the family farm, and consider other career options. He then switches to full-time study and specialises in Agroecology on the degree and, for his final-year project, pursues a comparative study of his family farm and a farm in Ghana.

## Carla



Carla is 25 and grew up in care. Carla did well at an alternative school, which she attended as a teenager, after having her daughter when she was 14. She is now a single parent and is in the process of completing her A-Levels part-time. She has been working as a Receptionist at a hairdressers part-time whilst completing her A-Levels, and was considering training to become a stylist – but her manager encouraged her to stay on an academic route

### What happens next?

Carla is pleased to find she can study full-time but focus her studies on 3 days per week, allowing her to balance the degree with part-time work and childcare. She finds she is particularly interested in Agroecology, and for her final-year project looks at how we can feed the next generation in Wales through sustainable approaches to food production.

Seema



Seema is 19 and was a high achiever at school until a family bereavement caused her to fall behind and then drop out during sixth form. Seema has missed studying and has taken several adult education courses recently, as she could engage in short bursts while she got used to the changes in her health and circumstances.

#### What happens next?

The option for part-time study appeals to Seema and allow her to pursue her studies in periods of good health. Seema specialises in creative practice and becomes interested in the relationship between creative writing and human rights. She plans to complete an MA in International Relations when she graduates.

Andy



Andy is 18 and attends a selective school in Kent, where he gets good grades but has always considered himself an outsider. He has been feeling very unsure about his next steps because he thinks university will be 'more of the same', with nobody really talking about what matters. Andy is expected to get top grades at A-Levels and was encouraged by his school to apply to top universities. He says he applied to Black Mountains College on an impulse, after reading about it online.

#### What happens next?

Andy loves the interdisciplinary nature of the programme and specialises in creative practice, focusing on documentary film-making. He is applying for a graduate scheme with the BBC after graduating.

Danielle



Danielle is 45 and lives in Hay-on-Wye. She has 3 children, and works part-time as a massage therapist. She completed 1 year of a university degree when she was 18, but dropped out after becoming disillusioned with the subject and homesick. Danielle has been looking for a way to return to studying for some time, but hasn't found a course that appeals to her. Her children are all now at school. She is strongly committed to environmental issues, and an anti-capitalist agenda.

#### What happens next?

Danielle starts off studying part-time, to balance with family commitments, and then switches to full-time study when her children are a bit older. She specialises in socio-technical systems and, in her final year, studies sustainable transport options in Hay-on-Wye. She plans to set up a sustainable transport consultancy when she graduates.

Gloria



Gloria is 67. She grew up in Dominica and came to England when she was 17, where she eventually trained as a nurse. She had children in her early 20s and is now a grandmother. Gloria has a lifelong interest in ecology – she says she would have chosen to become a botanist if she'd had the opportunity – and is particularly concerned about the effects of climate change in Dominica, where she still spends at least a month every year.

#### What happens next?

Gloria is initially daunted about studying and fears she will be much older than the other students. But she loves being part of a cohort with such a wide age range. Her final year project is called: 'Haunted futures: How can Dominica face the twin challenges of decolonisation and climate change?', and she plans to take the knowledge she has gained back to Dominica, as part of a charity she has co-founded there, when she graduates.

# What funding is available to study at Black Mountains College?

Tuition fees in Wales for all undergraduate degrees will be capped at £9,250 per year as of September 2025.

Student loans are available through the **Student Finance Wales** portal.

Apply online here:

[studentfinancewales.co.uk/undergraduate-finance/full-time/](https://studentfinancewales.co.uk/undergraduate-finance/full-time/)

You can apply for a student loan to cover the costs of tuition fees.

Welsh students will also be eligible for help with living costs in the form of additional grants and loans. You may be considered 'Welsh' if you have been living in Wales prior to applying to study. The amount you receive depends on your household income and where you are studying.

To see what's available, visit:

[studentfinancewales.co.uk/undergraduate-finance/full-time/](https://studentfinancewales.co.uk/undergraduate-finance/full-time/)

For Student Finance Ireland, visit: [studentfinancenl.co.uk/](https://studentfinancenl.co.uk/)

For Student Finance Scotland, visit: [saas.gov.uk/](https://saas.gov.uk/)

**Cardiff Metropolitan University** runs a money advice service and also has a fund for emergency assistance for students in difficulty. See here for more information:

[cardiffmet.ac.uk/study/student-services/finance/](https://cardiffmet.ac.uk/study/student-services/finance/)

If you have additional needs or are supporting or caring for others, further support may be available. Have a look at the student finance web pages for your home country or please contact us to discuss.



# How to Apply

We are delighted you are considering applying to study with us at Black Mountains College.

You can either apply for the BA (Hons) Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology and Systems Change directly to Black Mountains College, here: [blackmountainscollege.co.uk/how-to-apply](https://blackmountainscollege.co.uk/how-to-apply)

Or you can also make an application through the University Central Admissions Service (UCAS) here: [ucas.com/apply](https://ucas.com/apply)

Find us on UCAS, Cardiff Metropolitan/Black Mountains College - BA (Hons) Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology, and Systems Change UCAS Code: **BME1**

1. Apply on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)
2. Submit a personal statement
3. You may be asked to complete an admissions interview
4. Track your application progress on [ucas.com/track](https://ucas.com/track)
5. Decision received

We have designed and will continue to refine our admissions process to welcome expression and ambition in a range of formats. We want to focus on potential and passion for creating sustainable futures, not just past achievements.

Have a question? Contact us!

We are happy to talk to you about your study options including careers, accommodation, student finance and course details:

**[studyHE@blackmountainscollege.uk](mailto:studyHE@blackmountainscollege.uk)**

or please call

**+44 (0) 1874 711 888**

# Meet our Team

Black Mountains College is a new institution with a different way of doing things. Through your question-based modules you'll encounter a range of different tutors alongside core faculty that will be accompanying you through your learning journey.

Our core staff are:

**Andre Pusey** – Programme Lead

Andre is an experienced academic with a background in geography, environmental social movements and cooperatives, social justice, and an interest in critical pedagogical approaches. Andre leads our Higher Education programme.

**Rachel Sweetman** – Programme Coordinator and Lecturer

A researcher by training, she has studied varied educational systems and practices, always with a focus on how students relate to and experience their education. She is interested in how we learn, how we can shift, how we frame and interpret the world, and how learning can transform us.

**Dr. Natalia Ernstman** – Creative Practice Lead and Lecturer

Natalia is an artist and leads on our Creative Practice modules throughout the degree. She specialises in unlocking creativity and helping you find your voice and purpose in response to the new era of climate breakdown.

**Debojyoti Das** – Lecturer

A social scientist, geographer and science policy expert by training. A believer in practice-based learning, he uses interactive and reflexive pedagogy to promote group thinking. Currently working on climate adaptation and sustainability issues among marginalised littoral communities in the Indian Ocean region.

**Ian Rappel** – Agroecology Lecturer

Ian is training coordinator of The Agroecology Learning Collective (TALC). A former activist and ecology lecturer at Cardiff University. He specialises in how agroecology can be encouraged around the world and will lead the Agroecology pathway in Year 2.

**Prof. Tom Sperlinger** – Chief Academic Officer

Tom splits his time between Black Mountains College and the University of Bristol. He has devised a range of courses at Bristol and led the design of our degree. He will teach study skills and elements of creative practice at Black Mountains College.

**Christianne Wakeham** – Chief Operating Officer

Christianne led the foundation year in science and was a Lecturer on the Biomedical Science programme at the University of Worcester, as well as an admissions tutor for first year students. She will be delivering some of the science elements and keeping a close eye on your well-being.

**Ben Rawlence** – Co-founder and CEO

Ben is a writer, journalist and former political adviser. He has taught at the Universities of Chicago, London and been a visiting lecturer at Google, MIT, NYU, Cardiff Business School, Oxford Martin School, SOAS and many others. He specialises in political economy, international affairs and theories of change.

Our visiting faculty include:

**Gruffudd Hill** – Interdisciplinary researcher, practitioner, and educator in design theory, systems ecology and relational thought

**Bill McGuire** – Climate Scientist

**Emma Caldwell** – Geographer

**Hanna Poikonen** – Neuroscientist and Dancer

**James Dyke** – Climate Scientist

**Katie Mitchell** – Playwright

**Kirstie Simson** – Dancer

**Owen Griffiths** – Agronomist and Artist



# Education as if People and Planet Matter

By Natalia Ernstman  
and Ben Rawlence

Before the pandemic quashed mass gatherings, young people worldwide flocked to the streets to express their dismay with the status quo.



The school strikes didn't just call out grown-ups' inaction in the face of the climate emergency, pupils and students also walked out of classrooms to rebel against their education. They had had enough of being locked in a system that doesn't prepare them for a future which is looking increasingly unviable. Education has always mattered, of course, but its role in reproducing a destructive

economy – and its capacity to play a different, positive, role – elevates it to a zone of protest like never before.

Students around the world are calling on schools and universities to 'teach the future' – and they must. But it is the moral responsibility of a proper education system not just to tell students the truth about the climate and

ecological emergency but to prepare them for it. Putting that responsibility into practice is the animating idea behind an emergent institution on the border between England and Wales: Black Mountains College.

To confront and adapt to the unfolding planetary emergency we will need all the creative, adaptive and collaborative capacity human beings can muster: competencies that mainstream education is currently not well suited to foster. Existing secondary and tertiary education is almost entirely based on attaining economic, rather than broader, more human goals: preparing pupils for a 'lifetime of work' so that they contribute to the economy, while also supplying authorities with quantifiable data to hold schools and colleges accountable. The deteriorating mental health of young people which can partly be attributed to the increasing in testing and pressure to achieve academically<sup>1</sup>, shows that neither of these external goals contributes to well-being or the ability to live a fulfilling life. What's more, judging by the ecological crises, formal education is manifestly failing to teach people how to respect planetary life.

The case for a different, more complete understanding of education has been self-evident

to reformers for more than a century. Educationalist John Dewey, for example, critiqued schools for being outdated institutions that prepare children for a world of the past. In fact, he said, school shouldn't even be about preparing pupils for future living, education should be the process of living itself, based in the real world.<sup>2</sup> Education should serve human life, to discover and celebrate what it means to be human. It should also serve *all* life.

More recently, Gert Biesta described a pedagogy which focuses on democracy, ecology and care: teaching pupils to be in relation to the world without placing themselves solely at the centre of it. He calls this 'to exist in the world in a grown-up way', which is attained by developing 'the full potential' of a person.<sup>3</sup> This echoes the 'Buen Vivir' philosophy from South America that aims to educate humans to be in harmony with each other and their habitat, among others. Similar ideas have been the driving force behind educational experiments from Summerhill to Dartington, the Steiner movement, Reggio Emilia, Bauhaus, and Black Mountain College in North Carolina established in the 1930s. And yet, despite the proven successes of these so-called 'alternative' approaches in fostering creativity, innovation, emotional intelligence and so on, mainstream pedagogy



has remained stubbornly narrow, focusing on logo-centric activities that can be easily quantified and assessed.

In fact, as many people from indigenous communities to educationalists like Maria Montessori and Loris Malaguzzi pointed out long ago, we know that this is a very partial view of how humans learn. As neuroscience is now demonstrating, humans learn with their whole bodies, activating all their senses.<sup>4</sup> Memories are imprinted in all cells, not just brain cells. Neurological pathways are built by making links through experience. Humans learn through play, problem-solving, through engaging their emotions alongside their cognitive functions. None of this is new. And yet, the science of learning only seems to be taken seriously in early years education, rarely at secondary and almost never in universities. The planetary emergency demands that we urgently seize all that we know about how humans learn and apply it to the central challenge of our epoch: re-gaining our place within nature.

The new tertiary programme at Black Mountains College proposes that to best prepare for the challenges ahead we need to unleash the human: the core human competencies (that most employers, incidentally, also claim to want) of creativity,

communication, care, collaboration and critical thinking. With this in mind, BMC is designing a curriculum aimed at fostering skills not subjects, based on three foundational principles: learning to learn; artistic and sensory training; and taught in nature and applied settings of landscape and community.

To confront and adapt to a rapidly changing and uncertain environment, we need to be adept life-long learners. We need to understand how we learn individually as well as collectively in order to be responsive, resilient and resourceful members of communities that creatively confront challenges through improvisation and collaboration. The single degree programme at BMC therefore starts with asking the question 'how do we learn?' Students then take units blending the neuroscience of perception and cognition with artistic (visual, aural, movement) training to understand the foundations of human communication and interaction – with each other and with other lifeforms.

A transition to an ecological civilisation that respects planetary limits is of course, not a scientific problem but a problem of behaviour, culture and politics. And the currency of behaviour, and politics, as we know, is not argument but emotion,

experience and the imagined collective.<sup>5</sup> Sensory training and the practice of the arts is therefore essential pedagogical territory for an education that not only teaches but prepares for the future. Importantly, this is not about the theory of the arts or the logo-centric rhetoric of reading and writing, but creative practice: ways of seeing, hearing and moving; ways of creating, expressing and communicating.

The practice of the arts is common to all human societies. It is a democratic space for exploring different traditions, cultures and worldviews. It acknowledges different ways of seeing and knowing. Creative practice also teaches a method for approaching problems that is rooted in improvisation, play and experimentation. As an evolutionary human attribute, play teaches us to collaborate and co-exist, it reduces anxiety and stress, and helps us to creatively learn our way out of adverse conditions.<sup>6</sup> Knowing how to play and improvise, and continuing to do so as an adult, thus forms a key survival strategy for the Anthropocene.

Acquiring skill in a sensory field invites a radical re-appraisal of the meaning of the term 'interdisciplinary' that goes beyond the traditional blending of western canons of thought, the arbitrary 'disciplines' such as Politics,

Philosophy and Economics, examined only through a single cognitive lens. It widens the definition to encompass all spheres of human expression and participation in the world. This leads to the third principle of BMC: learning in the 'real world' on applied problems for meaningful and socially useful ends.

Learning to live in the Anthropocene means learning to regain our place within nature, learning to live within planetary limits. While this may sound simple, the gap between current resource use and safe planetary limits is huge. Mainstreaming ecology is, belatedly, becoming a fad in educational discourse, but learning about earth systems is not enough. Our current crisis is not due to a lack of environmental science. What is missing is a critical awareness of the limitations and potential of human systems. We are prisoners of what we imagine to be possible. We need leaders who see the world from an ecological starting point, who appreciate the scale of the challenge ahead, and who understand how emotion, perception and action combine to change behaviour.

How do you inculcate such an ecological perspective that accords non-human life appropriate respect? The first step is by making nature itself the classroom. BMC is sited on a 120 acre

farm and surrounding mountains. Sensory training outside will help to embed and embody the ideas of Merleau-Ponty updated by David Abram that 'all perception is participation' to open the door to seeing oneself as part of the biosphere, not separate from it.

Science has shown Dewey's ideas to be correct: the most durable lessons are those derived from problem-solving in context, in applied settings.<sup>7</sup> This is reflected in the third year at BMC designed to map the students' way in the world with a work placement and a student-driven research project keyed into realising the ambition of the unique Welsh law – the Well-Being of Future Generations Act – together with a seminar on theories of change examining where and how students might best apply their own talents. The purpose is to demonstrate and interrogate the tangible change that is possible so that graduates

of Black Mountains College are as well equipped as possible to answer the eternal question facing us all:

**What is the right thing for me to do, for myself, society and the planet, at this particular moment in time?**

#### References

1. See for example Hutchings, M. (2015) The impact of accountability measures on children and young people, research commissioned by the National Union of Teachers.
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3. Biesta, G. (2017) *Letting Art Teach: art education 'after' Joseph Beuys*, Arnhem: ArtEZ Press
4. Much of the recent neuro-science is well summarised in Stanislas Dehane, (2021) *How We Learn: the New Science of Education and The Brain*, London, Penguin.
5. See for example Hulme, M. (2011) 'Reducing the Future to Climate: A Story of Climate Determinism and Reductionism', *Osiris* 26(1)
6. Gammage, D. (2017) *Playful Awakening: Releasing the Gift of Play in Your Life*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
7. Elaine Yew et al. (2016) 'Problem Based Learning: An Overview of its Processes and Impact on Learning', *Health Professions Education*, Vol 2, Issue 2



# What do our students say about us?

‘A very friendly and open environment to learn and experience new things on an individual and group basis.’



‘All of the tutors are enthusiastic and passionate about their specialisms. I have found them to be encouraging and go out of their way to listen to students and cater for their learning experience. The small class sizes are particularly effective for delivering this kind of education.’

‘Fabulous institution and I feel very proud, fortunate and excited to be part of its initial journey.’

‘Welcoming and engaging staff and student community.’

‘I like the interdisciplinary approach – learning lots of different things that I’ve not been able to learn before...’



'I have met amazing people with stimulating thoughts.'

'The size of the groups are really good, and means that there's a personal connection between everyone.'

'I love the location – spaces to walk, rivers to swim, cycling, and being close to nature.'

'I wanted to do something that didn't make me feel guilty – it's a step in a movement towards living in a more ethical fashion in relation to climate change.'



'The degree has some great teambuilding exercises and activities. I feel like a community is growing.'

‘The BMC experience is brilliant. I am truly happy here, I would fully recommend it to friends and regularly do.’

‘The degree is interesting, informative, and inspiring.’



‘All of the BMC staff have been helpful & enthusiastic throughout the student experience so far. I’ve been made to feel welcome and definitely part of something by studying at BMC.’

# Contact Us

Join us at Black Mountains College and change the future, we'd love to hear from you.

For more information about how to apply please visit:  
[blackmountainscollege.uk/how-to-apply](https://blackmountainscollege.uk/how-to-apply)

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teaching  
the  
future**





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