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# A tale of two discourses: fossil fuel funding in UK and US university policy vs. Public debate

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**Abstract**
As the climate crisis intensifies, fossil fuel industry funding of academic research faces increasing scrutiny. This research examines the complex interplay between fossil fuel funding, corporate capture, and academic integrity in higher education, uncovering how public discourse frames industry funding as a mechanism of climate obstruction and delay. Employing a comparative approach, we analyse how fossil fuel funding is addressed in institutional policies versus public discourse across the UK and US, while investigating the emerging Fossil Free Research movement and its parallels with Fossil Fuel Divestment campaigns. Our findings reveal a significant disparity between public discourse and institutional governance approaches to fossil fuel funding, highlighting the pervasive presence of climate delay discourse and disinformation within academia. We identify country-specific differences between the UK and US shaped by their distinct higher education systems, while underscoring the need for policy reforms that protect transparency, research integrity, and academic freedom. The study concludes that these mechanisms of influence transcend fossil fuel funding, revealing how corporate interests across industries - from chemical and pharmaceutical to agriculture and technology sectors - systematically shape academic research to serve the profit-seeking interests of the private sector rather than the interests of the public, particularly in climate-related fields. Thus, we emphasise the imperative for higher education institutions to adopt stronger policies protecting the integrity of climate research and its crucial role in societal decision-making and reclaiming the public mission of higher education.

**Keywords** Higher education · Fossil fuels · Corporate capture · Research integrity · Climate obstruction · Institutional governance

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## 1 Introduction

From boardrooms to universities, the fossil fuel (FF) industry wields immense influence over society's responses to climate-change, directing political and economic discourse, and shaping policy-making decisions (Grady-Benson and Sarathy 2015; Stephens 2024; Roberts et al. 2025). Recent investigations by Ferguson and Matthews (2023) and Milman (2023) reveal the scale of this influence: Exxon has funnelled more than $700 million into US university research partnerships since 2010, while European institutions have received more than €260 million from FF companies for research, tuition fees, and grants. In the UK alone, 60 universities accepted at least €170 million between 2016 and 2023, with Shell emerging as the largest contributor at €62 million.

This entrenched influence faces growing scrutiny; on 18 March 2024 the University of Cambridge in the UK temporarily stopped accepting donations from FF companies after an independent report flagged due diligence shortcomings and highlighted a "high reputational risk" (Bryan 2024). Princeton University in the US has similarly distanced itself, refusing grants from 90 coal and tar sands companies while divesting $1.7 billion from FFs (Gilchrist and Kaufman 2022). Cambridge's actions mark the first UK university to halt FF partnerships, signalling potential shifts in approaches to FF funding in academia.

Despite mounting evidence of FF industry influence on academic research and climate policy – with scholars and activists increasingly arguing that FF funding steers climate and energy research toward FF–friendly technologies like carbon capture and storage, potentially limiting focus on FF phaseout (Roberts et al. 2025) - there remains a critical gap in understanding how institutions govern these funding relationships (Hiltner et al. 2024). While existing literature broadly examines corporate influence in academia (Morris and Jacquet 2024), including the role of conservative organisations in spreading climate disinformation (Oreskes and Conway 2011), the discursive gap *between* internal university policy and external media debate remains largely unexamined, an area this study directly addresses.

The overarching aim of this study is to understand how FF funding is addressed within higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK and US by analysing public and policy narratives. The study employs a grounded theory approach to analyse 50 news articles regarding FF funding and 39 policy documents from 32 HEIs, to identify key themes, patterns, and divergent approaches to this challenge. The analysis addresses three research questions:

RQ1 What are the key themes and narrative structures in how fossil fuel funding in higher education is addressed across institutional policies compared to public discourse?

RQ2 How do institutional policies and news media coverage differ in their treatment of fossil fuel funding in higher education?

RQ3 How do the distinct institutional contexts of the UK and US, specifically regarding public mandates versus private endowment dependence, shape their respective approaches to fossil fuel funding?

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Following a literature review examining FF industry engagement in HEIs, we explore the implications of public discourse and institutional policies on academic research and policy-making, tracing historical partner-

ships, and emerging resistance movements, and offer recommendations for research funding policy reform.

## 2 Background

Our review of the literature proceeds in three stages. We first examine how the marketisation of higher education creates structural vulnerability to FF industry capture (2.1), then introduce climate delay discourse as an analytical lens for understanding how this capture shapes research outcomes (2.2), before tracing the evolution of institutional resistance from divestment campaigns to the emerging Fossil Free Research movement (2.3).

### 2.1 Marketised universities and fossil fuel industry capture

HEIs operate in increasingly marketised, neoliberal environments (Marginson and Yang 2024). In the UK, between 1998 and 2012, governance shifted from public co-stewardship toward a model driven by student-funded tuition, top-down regulation, and performance metrics, increasing universities' reliance on corporate income (including FF funding) and aligning incentives more closely with revenue than with public-good research (Marginson and Yang 2024). In the US, elite private universities- particularly the Ivy League institutions-demonstrate an even greater reliance on private and philanthropic funding (Stephens 2024), a structural characteristic that helps account for their historically higher levels of FF industry support (Milman 2023). This public-private distinction is analytically significant: Russell Group universities operate within a predominantly publicly funded system with attendant accountability mechanisms, whereas Ivy League institutions function within a privatised model where donor relationships and endowment management carry greater institutional weight. Across both contexts, HEIs navigate a persistent tension between market-driven financial imperatives and societal expectations for research integrity, influencing how FF funding is regulated and interpreted by both institutional actors and the public. These market-driven financial imperatives create conditions for 'academic capture' - a term expanded upon by Lachapelle et al. (2024) to describe how powerful minority interests shape research agendas to serve private goals at the expense of wider societal objectives. While distinct in funding models - US institutions relying heavily on private philanthropy and UK institutions on tuition and government metrics - both systems face persistent tension between revenue generation and research integrity. This context enables FF 'industry capture', a subset of 'corporate capture' (coined by Franta and Supran (2017) and expanded upon in recent empirical work (e.g., Lachapelle et al. 2024),) to operate via research 'funding' in the form of contractual project agreements, and 'donations', often framed as unrestricted philanthropic gifts (University of Cambridge 2025a, 2025b).

To clarify the scope of this study, fossil fuel research funding refers to direct financial relationships between fossil fuel companies and university research activities, whether through contractual research agreements or sponsored research centeres. Fossil fuel divestment, by contrast, targets the investment holdings of university pensions and endowments, the centrally managed asset pools that institutions use to fund operations, scholarships, and infrastructure. This study is primarily concerned with the former and how this is governed

by institutional policy - though we trace the connections between divestment campaigns and the emerging Fossil Free Research movement given their shared institutional logics.

Research shows that these mechanisms shape both academic outputs and public perceptions. FF-backed academic energy centres, for instance, often depict natural gas favourably and wield substantial influence in climate policy decisions (Almond et al. 2022). Specific examples underscore this dynamic. Princeton University's Carbon Mitigation Initiative, funded by BP since 2000, has faced criticism for placing limited emphasis on fossil fuel phaseout. Similarly, student researchers at Columbia University identified over $43 million in industry funding since 2005, with the Center on Global Energy Policy alone receiving $15 million—funding linked to research disproportionately favourable toward continued gas use (Noor 2024). By accepting FF funding and prioritising private interests over the public good, HEIs reinforce denialist narratives and consumer-focused framings of climate change instead of promoting narratives of transformative change and systemic reform (Kinol et al. 2023; Grasso 2022; Cohen 2022a). This dynamic underscores calls to limit the industry's influence, not only by excluding oil and gas companies but also by reconsidering donations from individuals whose wealth derives from FFs (Basseches et al. 2022; Cohen 2022a). To counter these risks, scholars advocate stronger transparency and inclusive governance in HEIs, increasingly recognised as essential to climate action planning (Lachapelle et al. 2024; McGeown and Barry 2023).

Having established the structural conditions that enable industry capture, we turn to the specific discursive mechanisms through which this capture manifests - namely, how FF funding operationalises climate delay within academic settings.

### 2.2 Climate delay discourse in academic settings

Much like discourses have the capacity to reframe delay in corporate and political realms (Lamb et al. 2020; Lachapelle et al. 2024), we examine how FF industry capture similarly influences research directions and outcomes in a way that delays action.

FF funding can operationalise climate delay discourse within academia in four key ways (Lamb et al. 2020) (see Table 1): it 1) redirects responsibility by prioritising research on consumer behaviour over systemic change (Grasso 2022); 2) pushes non-transformative solutions by promoting 'solutionism,' such as depicting natural gas favourably (Almond et al. 2022); 3) emphasises the downsides of change by funding work that suggests the energy transition will harm impoverished communities (Westervelt 2021); and 4) cultivates surrender by advancing the notion that change is impossible, a discourse common among industry representatives (Kuhl et al. 2024)

These four typologies operate synergistically within academic institutions, where research funding decisions can amplify or legitimise delay discourses through peer-reviewed research outputs. Recognising these discursive mechanisms is essential because they constitute the very problem that institutional resistance movements seek to address – if fossil fuel funding shapes research in ways that delay climate action, then the governance of that funding becomes a site of political and ethical contestation. Two related movements have emerged in response, each targeting a different dimension of the university–industry relationship: fossil fuel divestment, which focuses on institutional endowments, and the more recent Fossil Free Research (FFR) campaign, which targets research funding directly.

**Table 1** Lamb et al.'s (2020) four typologies of climate delay discourse, with examples of how each manifest in the context of academic FF funding

| Typology of Delay (Lamb et al. 2020) | Manifestation in Academic Fossil Fuel Funding |
|---|---|
| FFF redirects responsibility | Research funding priorities emphasise consumer behaviour over institutional change (Grasso 2022).<br>The FF industry has shaped a misleading public narrative that frames climate change as primarily driven by consumer choices rather than systemic changes (Grasso 2022). |
| FFF pushes non-transformative solutions | BP provided funding to Cambridge University, for research on battery-charging technologies and carbon capture and storage (Gross 2023).<br>The FF industry sees carbon capture and storage as a "get-out-of-jail-free card for continued oil and gas production" (Ferguson and Matthews 2023). |
| The FF industry emphasises the downsides of change | Westervelt (2021) finds the FF industry argues that shifting away from FFs will inevitably harm impoverished communities.<br>Research centres accepting funding from the gas industry are more likely to downplay the role renewable energy sources might play in the energy transition (Westervelt 2021). |
| FFF promotes 'surrender' | FFF advances the notion that 'change is impossible' Kuhl et al. (2024). |

### 2.3 From divestment to fossil free research: the evolution of institutional resistance

The FF divestment movement provides a critical historical and theoretical precedent for understanding institutional responses to industry influence. Richardson (2016) argues that for universities profiting from the FF industry, the primary stake is not legal liability but their "social license" and public reputation. They link this to the ethical theory of leverage-based responsibility, which posits that institutions have a duty to exercise their relationships to improve societal outcomes (Wood 2011).

Empirical evidence confirms this leverage-based responsibility. Healy and Debski's (2016) study of US university FF divestment movements (2014–2016) found 68% of HEIs adopted institutional investment legislation upholding FF divestment and environmental, social, and governance criteria, suggesting these movements have the potential to instigate systemic changes. Similarly, Gibson and Duram's (2020) ten-year study shows FF divestment campaigns in US HEIs have successfully fuelled international climate activism and challenged embedded notions of sustainability. Barron et al. (2023) reinforce this assertion by identifying a correlation between global HEI divestment and University rankings, confirming that reputation is a significant factor in divestment decisions.

These movements typically operate within a three-wave framework, escalating from initial actions by core groups to broader adoption spurred by campus pressure, eventually influencing mainstream market norms (Ansar et al. 2013). Historical examples, such as the student-led anti-apartheid movement, demonstrate that campus activism can create systemic change by leveraging institutional and reputational pressure (Manulak 2024). Recent scholarship suggests this logic is expanding. Gransaull et al. (2022) assert that divestment campaigns are evolving to target FF debt financing and economic activities exceeding planetary boundaries, while Strauch et al. (2020) demonstrate how this framework integrates radical concepts like 'Keep it in the Ground' into mainstream financial discourse. This adaptability suggests the divestment movement's logic is now naturally extending to a new frontier: academic research itself.

Building on the 'leverage-based responsibility' of the divestment movement Fossil Free Research (FFR) emerged in 2022 as a direct institutional response to the climate delay discourses perpetuated through FF funding (Engelfried 2022). While sharing similarities with divestment campaigns (Healy and Barry 2017; Stephens et al. 2018), FFR pivots focus from centrally managed endowments to targets mechanisms through which research can be influenced by industry funding (Cohen 2022a).

McGeown and Barry (2023) describe FFR as a transatlantic coalition of student and academic activists seeking to exert pressure on all US and UK universities to establish bans on receiving FF funding for climate change, environmental, and energy policy research (Fossil Free Research 2024). This represents a shift from purely financial tactics to an institutional-level attempt to address the 'academic capture' of academic research identified by Lachapelle et al. (2024). Early successes such as Princeton's 2022 commitment to refuse gifts and grants from 90 FF companies, suggest this shift is gaining traction (Gilchrist and Kaufman 2022).

The FFR movement has sparked debate over how to best mitigate industry influence, with scholars advocating for either comprehensive funding bans (Mann 2021; Franta 2021) or more nuanced policies that maintain research independence while mitigating industry influence (Cohen 2022a). This tension highlights the core challenge of upholding academic integrity - a commitment to fundamental values like honesty and trust (ICAI 2025) - amidst powerful external interests.

The emergent FFR campaign shares several similarities with the FF divestment movement - student led, elite universities, and legitimacy from prior campaigns (Healy and Debski 2016; Barron et al. 2023). Institutional responses also show parallels: although the University of Cambridge is the only UK HEI to sever funding ties with the FF industry (Bryan 2024), this could mirror FF divestment patterns where high-ranking HEIs are more likely to divest if their reputation is at risk (Barron et al. 2023).

However, the transition from divestment to research restrictions presents distinct governance challenges. While FFR draws legitimacy from the FF divestment movement, the targets differ. Divestment campaigns target centrally managed endowments whereas FFR targets faculty-controlled research grants (Barron et al. 2023). This distinction means FFR must contend with tensions regarding academic freedom and researcher autonomy, as restrictions on FF funding could directly affect faculty's ability to conduct independent research. Consequently, policy negotiations are significantly more intricate than those concerning endowment divestment, requiring institutions to balance ethical consistency with the protection of scholarly independence. Understanding these similarities and differences is crucial for predicting FFR's potential evolution, adoption patterns, and effectiveness, providing a more nuanced framework for assessing how student-led activism and institutional policy interact in the context of FF funding.

Despite these challenges, historical divestment precedents suggest that such balance is achievable. Universities have previously successfully disengaged from controversial funding sources, such as tobacco and arms industries, without compromising academic freedom. Examples include Oxford University's student-led movement against arms manufacturers (Jaay 2024) and UK universities' 2004 protocol with Cancer Research UK to sever ties with the tobacco industry (Mayer 2004). These cases demonstrate that institutions can move away from controversial funding while safeguarding research independence, provided there are clear ethical frameworks and alternative funding models.

Taken together, this literature identifies three interconnected gaps. First, while FF industry capture of academic research is well documented (Section 2.1) and its discursive effects theorised (Section 2.2), the specific narratives through which FF funding is addressed in institutional policies versus public discourse remain underexamined (RQ1). Second, the substantive differences between these two domains (one oriented toward administrative governance, the other toward political contestation) have not been systematically compared (RQ2). Third, the distinct higher education systems of the UK and US, with their differing funding structures and institutional logics, are likely to produce divergent approaches to FF funding that warrant cross-national analysis (RQ3).

## 3 Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative content analysis with quantitative coding to examine the divergent discursive framings of FF funding in public media versus institutional policy. The research design was guided by established frameworks for institutional policy analysis and utilised computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) to ensure systematic and replicable results (Mohajan and Mohajan 2022; Noble and Mitchell 2016).

### 3.1 Data collection

This study examines discursive divergences in public media and policy documents among HEIs in the UK and US, using publicly available data from 2012 to 2024 (Appendix A). The US and UK were selected due to prior comparative research on media discourse and the strong influence of the FF industry in their HEIs (Hiltner et al. 2024). We selected two groups of elite institutions: the UK Russell Group (predominantly public-funded) and the US Ivy League (private, endowment-dependent) universities (see Appendix A). While structurally distinct, this comparison was chosen to illuminate how contrasting funding models (state-regulated versus market-driven) shape institutional vulnerability to industry influence. Equally, while not representative of the entire higher education sector, this sample enables focused analysis of how the most powerful institutions navigate FF funding.

The sampling strategy employed two stages. First, institutional policy documents were systematically collected to capture how FF funding is captured within the internal administrative sphere of HEIs. Documents were identified through targeted searches of university websites and public repositories using terms such as *research funding policy*, *funding guidance*, and *conflict of interest*. Document inclusion required substantive content on research funding, integrity, or external funding acceptance. The final sample comprised 39 documents spanning 2012 to 2024 across the 24 UK Russell Group and 8 US Ivy League universities (McCabe 2023; U.S.News 2023). Policy types ranged from research governance documents to specific external funding guidelines, with selection criteria focusing on relevance to research funding processes and oversight.

Documents typically average around 30 pages, though length varies depending on scope (e.g., shorter specific policies on Conflict of Interest). Content-wise, Russell Group policies emphasise transparency and responsible income management, focusing on ethical standards and institutional reputation while affirming academic freedom. In contrast, US Ivy League

policies, while also addressing core governance, give explicit attention to financial motivations and incentives, particularly regarding donor and commercially funded research. Crucially, however, both sets of documents rely on generalized disclosure frameworks rather than sector-specific exclusions.

Second, news articles were collected as a distinct data source to examine how FF funding is represented within the public sphere. The comparison of these two datasets is key to revealing the discursive gap, as it provides crucial insights into institutional priorities, reputational management, and the drivers of policy inertia. The final sample comprised 50 articles- 22 from the UK and 28 from the US- sourced from mainstream media, blogs, opinion pieces, and academic news sources. Both news articles and opinion pieces contribute to the public construction of FF funding, with news articles often establishing the factual landscape of funding relationships and opinion pieces providing the normative interpretation of those facts. To enhance reliability, news articles were identified through systematic Google searches using terms such as '*fossil fuel industry funding academic research'* and '*fossil fuel funding in universities'*, with Google News used to further refine the searches and capture relevant and recent articles. Most articles were published between 2022 and 2024, coinciding with the rise of FFR discourse. Following Andrade's (2018) guidance on preserving internal validity, established keyword searches were employed without date restrictions, ensuring inclusion of the most relevant sources regardless of their publication date.

### 3.2 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo to ensure systematic and comprehensive coding and analysis of the collected data. The process was divided into two phases: analysis of policy documents and analysis of news articles. Initial codes were developed inductively from the data, then refined through iterative coding cycles. The final codebook included 37 distinct codes organised into 5 thematic categories:

1) Internal Considerations: Themes tied to university's internal governance, values, and strategic self-perception. 'Reputation' is included here, though externally influenced, it is managed by the institution as a strategic asset.
2) External Motivations: Pressures originating outside the university, such as political and financial interests. 'Disinformation' and 'misrepresentation' fall under this category as external actors use FF funding to shape public perception and influence institutional decision-making.
3) Discourse of Climate Delay: Includes themes relating to how FF funding contributes to delaying climate action.
4) Fossil Fuels: Focuses on the major FF companies funding or donating to universities across the UK and US, highlighting their influence.
5) Fossil Free: Covers philanthropic donations, the FFR movement, sustainability initiatives and divestment. 'Tobacco' is included as a historical example of university divestment campaigns, providing a precedent for contemporary FFR efforts.

Policy documents were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), guided by the research questions, to identify key themes and patterns (Braun and Clarke 2019). Relevant codes were identified and grouped into broader categories, facilitating thematic analysis,

and ensuring alignment with the research objectives. Country-specific hierarchy charts were generated to visually represent the coding structure, enhancing clarity and interpretability of relationships between codes. To ensure methodological rigour, the coding was performed by a single researcher using a systematic and reflexive approach. The process involved several iterative stages designed to minimise bias: an initial open coding of a data sample, the development of a preliminary codebook with clear definitions, a period of codebook refinement and testing, and finally, a comprehensive re-coding of the entire dataset to ensure consistency. While the absence of a second coder to establish intercoder reliability is a limitation, these iterative steps were implemented to ensure the coding was as systematic and robust as possible.

News articles were then individually coded in NVivo using RTA to identify key themes and patterns (Braun and Clarke 2019). Open coding allowed new codes to emerge during analysis (Allsop et al. 2022). Themes were not predefined; instead, RTA facilitated their development through initial familiarisation, allowing the organisation of codes around central patterns that emerged from the data. Hierarchy charts were also created for country-specific news articles to facilitate comparative analysis. This systematic approach ensured a detailed, replicable analysis of the discourse surrounding FF industry funding in academic research.

## 4 Results

Figures 1 to 4 reveal distinct thematic patterns between news discourse and institutional policies, with certain topics receiving markedly different levels of attention across documents and countries. Our analysis below examines these differences.

### 4.1 Public discourse coverage

The analysis of 50 news articles identified five thematic clusters, with subtopics appearing a total of 334 times (see Table 2). Figures 1 and 2 show the fossil fuels cluster (FF companies and activities) emerged most prominently, followed by internal considerations (e.g. conflicts of interest, academic freedom, reputation), external motivations (e.g. disinformation, greenwashing, political/economic motivations), fossil free approaches (e.g. divestment, tobacco, philanthropy) and discourses of climate delay (FF funding promotes non-transformative solutions, surrender and redirects responsibility).

The discursive gap is starkly quantified by their reference to the FF industry - a primary subject in news media, with 120 mentions, yet was named in only three of the 39 institutional policies examined. The few policies that explicitly mention fossil fuels do so with cautious, risk-mitigating language. LSE's policy, for instance, adopts an exclusionary approach, naming "thermal coal mining or oil/tar sands extraction" as high-risk activities (LSE 2021, p0.4). In contrast, the University of Oxford employs a more conditional framework, permitting funds only if the research has no connection to extraction or if its purpose explicitly speeds the transition to net-zero carbon (University of Oxford 2022). This variation demonstrates that even among the most engaged universities, the response is not uniform, but is instead characterised by carefully worded, bespoke policies designed to manage reputational risk on a case-by-case basis. Analysis of specific FF companies revealed varied

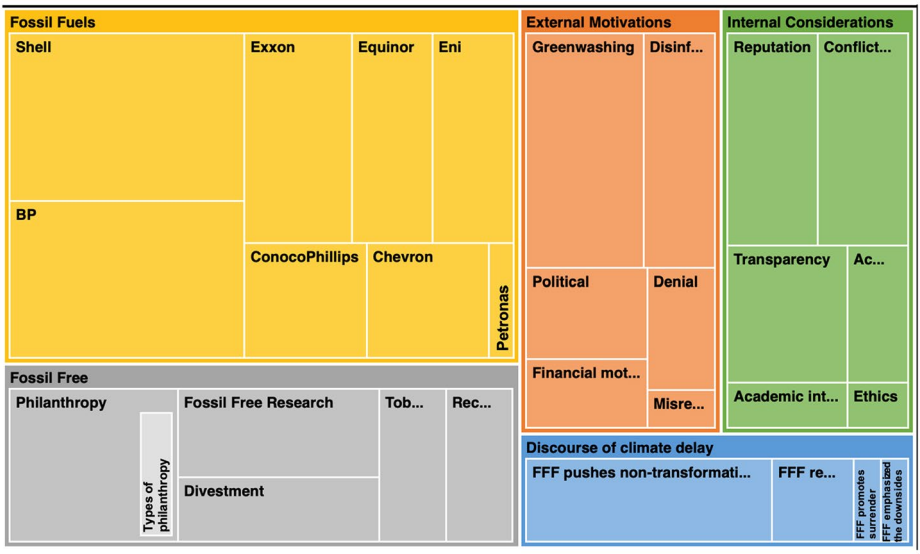


**Fig. 1** A hierarchy chart of themes in UK news articles generated in NVivo illustrating the thematic coding of 22 news articles from the UK, obtained through a systematic search on Google, regarding FFF in university research. The chart shows the hierarchical structure of themes and sub-themes identified through qualitative analysis

attention across sources, with Shell (24 mentions), BP (25 mentions), and Exxon (23 mentions) receiving the most coverage.

Internal considerations emerged as the second most mentioned theme (71 mentions), with conflicts of interest being frequently addressed (20 mentions). Public discourse frequently frames FF funding through the lens of internal university governance, with news articles consistently highlighting how funding creates conflicts of interest (20 mentions) that compromise academic integrity and academic freedom (16 mentions). For instance, The Nation argues FFR is "a call to protect such research's integrity" from the skewed outcomes produced by vested corporate interests, suggesting that existing safeguards are insufficient (Cohen and Lowe 2022).

Academic freedom is a recurring theme in news discourse (16 mentions), often framed in tension with FF funding in both the UK and US. News articles warn that dissociation from FF companies could constrain academic partnerships and impede climate solutions, with a Stanford report describing academic freedom as the "underpinning of good science" (Peacock 2024). Others argue the opposite: "a business model reliant on sustained FF extraction is fundamentally predicated on the rejection of truth. From the moment that scholarly research comes to rely on such a business model, academic freedom cannot exist" (Lowe and Chung 2022). Institutional reputation also features (9 mentions), typically linked to universities' public responsibilities. Hall (2018) argues that UK universities, as public research institutions, must serve the public good, reinforcing the need for UK universities to align their funding practices with their mission and ultimately minimise reputational risks.

The discourse of climate delay appears exclusively in news articles (41 mentions), dominated by non-transformative solutions (25 mentions). Coverage highlights FF companies funding ostensibly sustainable technologies, such as BP's support for research at Cambridge

**Table 2** A table showing the frequency of themes across policy documents and news articles

| Umbrella topic | Sub-topics | Frequency in UK news articles | Frequency in US news articles | Frequency in UK policies | Frequency in US policies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Discourse of climate delay** | | **14** | **27** | **0** | **0** |
| | FFF emphasises the downsides | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| | FFF promotes surrender | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | FFF pushes non-transformative solutions | 9 | 16 | 0 | 0 |
| | FFF redirects responsibility | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| **External Motivations** | | **26** | **30** | **20** | **5** |
| | Benefits of FFF | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | Denial | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Disinformation | 6 | 11 | 6 | 0 |
| | FF industry monitoring activities | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| | Financial motivations | 3 | 2 | 6 | 5 |
| | Political motivations | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | Greenwashing | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Misrepresentation | 1 | 2 | 7 | 0 |
| **Fossil Free** | | **18** | **28** | **30** | **0** |
| | Fossil Free Research | 7 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| | Divestment | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Philanthropy | 8 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| | Recommendations | 4 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| | Sustainability | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| | Environment | 0 | 0 | 14 | 0 |
| | Tobacco | 4 | 5 | 7 | 0 |
| **Fossil Fuels** | | **58** | **62** | **3** | **0** |
| | Oil, coal, tar sands, natural gas | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | American Petroleum Institute | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Aramco | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | BP | 13 | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| | Chevron | 5 | 9 | 0 | 0 |
| | ConocoPhillips | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Eni | 6 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Equinor | 6 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| | Exxon | 8 | 15 | 0 | 0 |
| | Petronas | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Shell | 14 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| **Internal Considerations** | | **26** | **45** | 101 | **26** |
| | Academic freedom | 3 | 13 | 11 | 5 |
| | Academic integrity | 2 | 6 | 20 | 5 |
| | Conflict of interest | 7 | 13 | 21 | 5 |
| | Ethics | 1 | 1 | 13 | 2 |
| | Expectations | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| | Reputation | 7 | 2 | 13 | 2 |
| | Transparency | 6 | 10 | 21 | 7 |

on battery charging and carbon capture (Gross 2023). Critics frame these investments as strategies to prolong oil and gas production, labelling carbon capture a "get-out-of-jail-free card" (Ferguson and Matthews 2023). News outlets also note repeated portrayals of natural gas as a viable solution for the energy transition (Milman 2024; Cohen 2022b, 2023).

Public discourse often highlights external motivations (56 mentions) including disinformation, greenwashing, and political pressures. Within academia, FF funding is portrayed as

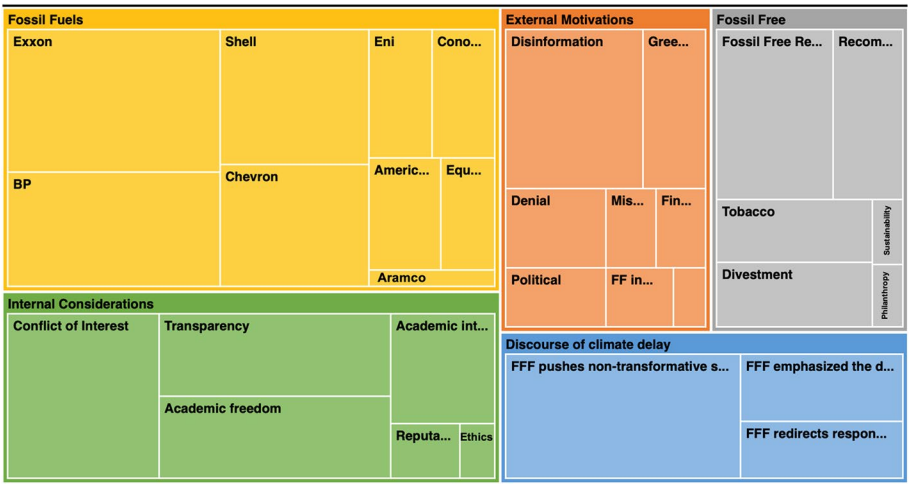


**Fig. 2** A hierarchy chart of themes in US news articles generated in NVivo illustrating the thematic coding of 28 news articles from the US, obtained through a systematic search on Google, regarding FFF in university research. The chart shows the hierarchical structure of themes and sub-themes identified through qualitative analysis

a tool for deliberately spreading misleading information and deceiving the public (Milman 2024), with critics further arguing that "there is no justification for being complicit in the greenwashing of these big corporations" (Corderoy 2021). Political influence also features prominently, with right-wing organisations like the Koch Family Foundation in the US cited as shaping research funding policies (Downie and Baumberg 2024; Cohen 2022a). Closely related is the theme of 'denial' (7 mentions), with an Op-Ed by Cohen and Mann (2022) stating that part of the FF industry's fight to keep its business model alive is to promote "climate science denial".

Public discourse also engages with fossil-free narratives (46 mentions), with the theme of FFR appearing 17 times, particularly in news articles published between 2022 and 2024. An example being Cohen (2023) reporting that VU Amsterdam adopted an FFR policy in response to growing demonstrations, declaring it would "reject research collaborations with any FF company that fails to demonstrate a commitment to the goals of the Paris climate accords," and citing "the FF industry's misinformation efforts" as justification. The theme of divestment also appears exclusively in news articles, where the successes of FF divestment movements and their influence on FFR campaigns are discussed, such as the example of Cambridge University (Smith 2022). Public discourse also exclusively highlighted historical precedents, with both Parkinson and Almond noting that universities have banned tobacco funding due to public deception, suggesting a similar treatment is necessary for FF funding (Ferguson and Matthews 2023; Levine and Franco 2023).

Within the fossil free narratives cluster, news articles also exclusively propose recommendations for universities to combat the FF industry's corporate capture of academia (10 mentions). For instance, Cohen and Mann (2022) suggest that HEIs should ban climate and energy research funding from the top 200 publicly listed FF companies and their subsidiaries, as well as from organisations like Koch Industries and the Sarah Scaife Foundation that

support climate denial. Cohen (2022b) further advises researchers to consider the implications of accepting funding from individuals whose wealth derives from the FF industry.

### 4.2 Comparison of UK and US public discourse

Delving deeper, our analysis reveals distinct patterns in how public discourses in the UK (Figure 1) and US (Fig. 2) approach FF funding in academia, with notable variations in thematic emphasis and framing. A total of 142 themes emerge within UK news discourse, compared to 192 in US news discourse (see Table 2).

Discourses of climate delay manifest unevenly across contexts, appearing nearly twice as often in US news sources (27 mentions) as in the UK (14). UK coverage emphasises non-transformative solutions (9 mentions), whereas US discourse spans a broader range of tactics, including emphasising downsides (6 mentions), redirecting responsibility (5 mentions), and promoting non-transformative solutions (16 mentions). Illustrative cases include a Guardian report that research centres funded by the gas industry downplay the role of renewables in the energy transition (Westervelt 2021), and the Harvard Gazette's observation that ExxonMobil shifts attention to "consumer energy demand" rather than its own FF supply (Powell 2021).

Internal considerations also diverge, with far greater prominence in US coverage (45 mentions) than in the UK (26). US sources more frequently reference academic freedom (13 mentions vs. 3), conflicts of interest (13 vs. 7), transparency (10 vs. 6), and integrity (6 vs. 2). Examples include calls at Stanford for "more transparency around oil partnerships" (Noor 2024) and concerns that FF ties undermine academic freedom (Sneath 2024). By contrast, UK discourse foregrounds reputational risks (7 mentions vs. 2), warning that FF funding "tarnishes the reputations" of universities (Corderoy 2021) and carries "high reputational risk" (Williams 2023).

Within fossil-free narratives, philanthropy emerges as a largely UK-specific theme (8 mentions vs. 1 in the US). Oxford University has received FF donations for scholarships rather than research (Smith 2022), and although UK media discourse has not highlighted serious concerns about HEIs accepting such donations, Cambridge University perceives reputational risks even from such non-research funding (Gross 2023). Alternatives are debated, with Ferguson and Matthews (2023) suggesting raising corporate taxes to support UK universities, and US discourse, though limited, highlighting private philanthropy as a substitute for FF funding, with Harvard's Salata Institute cited as a model (Scott-Buechler and Statler 2022).

### 4.3 Institutional policy coverage

Our analysis of 39 institutional policies revealed four thematic clusters, with subtopics appearing a total of 185 times (see Table 2). The internal considerations cluster featured most prominently, followed by fossil free approaches, external motivations, and FFs (see Figs. 3 and 4).

Institutional policies are dominated by internal, procedural considerations (127 mentions), focusing overwhelmingly on administrative safeguards like transparency (28 mentions), conflicts of interest (26 mentions), and academic integrity (25 mentions). This

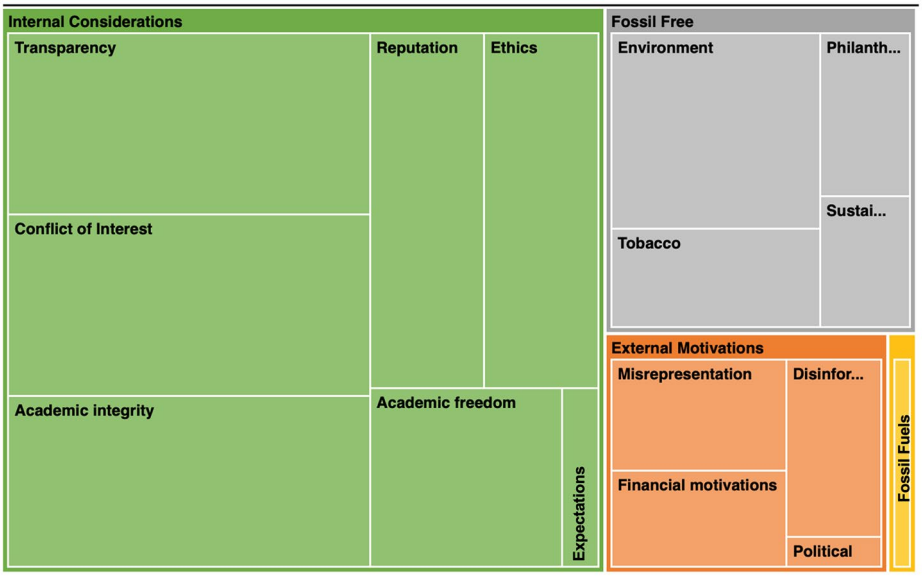


**Fig. 3** A hierarchy chart of themes in UK policy documents generated in NVivo illustrating the thematic coding of 29 policy documents from 24 UK Russell group universities, obtained through systematic searches on Google and university websites, regarding research funding. The chart shows the hierarchical structure of themes identified through qualitative analysis

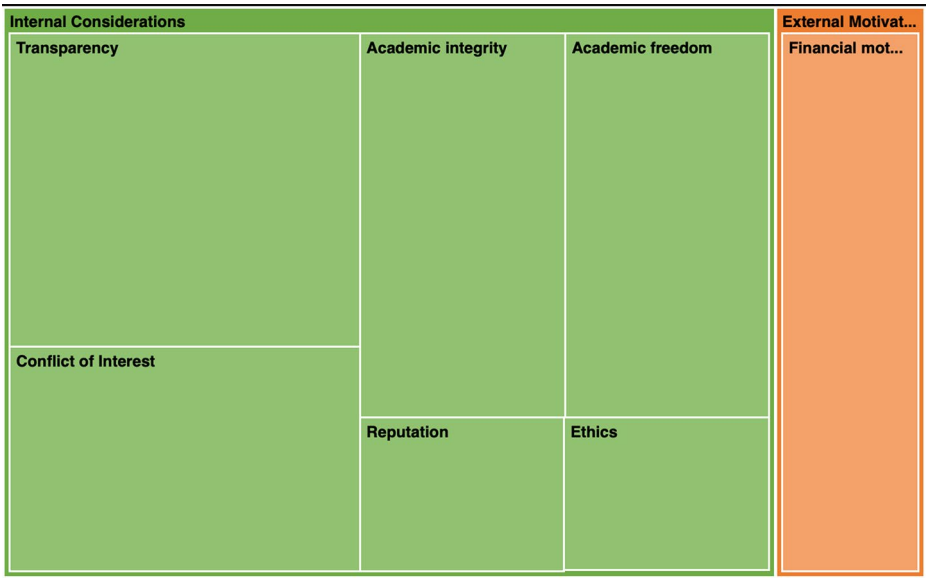


**Fig. 4** A hierarchy chart of themes in US policy documents generated in NVivo illustrating the thematic coding of 10 policy documents from 8 US Ivy league universities, obtained through systematic searches on Google and university websites, regarding research funding. The chart shows the hierarchical structure of themes identified through qualitative analysis

administrative discourse, emphasising alignment with university missions and codes of ethics, stands in stark contrast to the politically-focused critiques common in news media.

Institutional reputation is another recurring theme in policy documents (15 mentions), framed as a matter of safeguarding universities from reputational harm arising from conflicts with funding bodies. Policies emphasise the need to preserve academic integrity, uphold academic freedom, and manage conflicts of interest as central to protecting institutional standing (Imperial College London 2019; Cardiff University 2023; University of Edinburgh 2022).

Fossil-free narratives in policy documents are most frequently framed through analogies with tobacco (7 mentions)- an example being Queen's University Belfast (2022) which states "In accordance with Cancer Research UKs Code of Practice and UUKs Protocol on Tobacco Industry Funding to universities, the University will not knowingly accept funds from the tobacco industry."

Finally, environmental responsibility and sustainability similarly surface as recurring policy themes (18 mentions), typically framed as ethical obligations within institutional codes of conduct. For example, UCL's Statement on Research Integrity requires researchers to "respect all participants in, and subjects of, research, involving … the environment" (UCL 2020), while the University of Southampton identifies sustainability as a core principle in its research governance (2017). Unlike in news discourse, where these ideas appear indirectly, policy documents embed them explicitly in formal commitments.

### 4.4 Comparison of UK and US institutional policies

The comparison between UK (Fig. 3) and US (Fig. 4) policy documents reveal notable differences in priorities, reflecting broader distinctions in their higher education systems and funding models. A total of 154 themes emerge within UK policies, compared to 31 in US policies (see Table 2).

Firstly, internal considerations dominate policy documents in both countries, though with markedly different emphases. UK policies place a much stronger administrative focus, referencing academic integrity and conflicts of interest nearly four times more often than their US counterparts. Secondly, fossil-free discourse appears exclusively in UK policies, where environment (14 mentions), sustainability (4), and analogies to tobacco funding and philanthropy (12) are recurring themes. For instance, the London School of Economics' (LSE) External Funding Acceptance Policy states that the university will "not accept funding which would compromise its independence" (LSE 2021). Thirdly, external motivations are likewise more prominent in UK policies (20 mentions vs. 5 in the US), particularly around disinformation (6 vs. 0) and misrepresentation (7 vs. 0). The University of Birmingham's Code of Practice, for example, defines misconduct as the "misrepresentation of interests, including failure to declare material interests" (2021). By contrast, US policies foreground financial considerations, one of the few consistently identified themes across institutions. Princeton University (2024) policy highlights financial conflicts of interest in research, while Columbia University (2022) explicitly recognises partnerships with commercial enterprises to generate both public benefit and commercial value.

# 5 Discussion

## 5.1 Overview

This study compared public discourse and institutional funding policies' responses to FF funding in academia across the UK and US, particularly focusing on how these policies fail to address FF industry capture of academic research, with consequent far reaching climate policy implications. While previous research has examined climate delay discourse in broader contexts (Lamb et al. 2020), there has been a notable gap in literature addressing and analysing approaches to prevent FF industry capture of academic research in HEIs (Hiltner et al. 2024).

Our analysis reveals a marked divergence between how public discourse and institutional policies frame FF funding. Public media frequently highlight the potential for FF funding to shape narratives around climate delay, disinformation, and the public legitimacy of research. Institutional policies, however, tend to foreground procedural governance and administrative safeguards without directly engaging these broader concerns. In line with Almond et al. (2022), this divergence suggests a need to revisit HEI policies to better align them with the contested socio-political context in which FF funding occurs. The results highlight the importance of maintaining transparency between researchers and funders, and minimising conflicts of interest to preserve academic integrity, academic freedom and ultimately, institutional reputation. The findings indicate that while increasing transparency is crucial, it alone is insufficient, advancing work by Lachapelle et al. (2024). To effectively address conflicts of interest and preserve academic integrity, policies could explicitly ban FF industry funding. Many existing policies, despite their stated aims, grant excessive discretion to researchers, and financially strained universities may overlook these conflicts.

## 5.2 The discursive gap: what the policy-media disconnect reveals

The central finding of this study is a significant discursive gap between how universities' institutional policies and public media discourse address FF funding. Our analysis of RQ1 (What are the key themes and narrative structures in how fossil fuel funding in higher education is addressed across institutional policies compared to public discourse?) shows that while both domains raise issues of transparency, conflicts of interest, and academic integrity, they diverge sharply in scope. Media analysis identifies BP, Shell, and Exxon as dominant donors in both the UK and US, establishing a pattern of concentrated funding. A notable parallel emerges in how both reference the tobacco industry as a precedent, yet with distinct applications: media use it as an ethical precedent for FF funding (Hiltner et al. 2024), whereas institutional policies invoke it mainly to justify narrow exclusionary criteria. This dual application highlights how historical examples serve both as rhetorical devices for public advocacy and as limited tools for administrative compliance.

Our analysis of RQ2 (How do institutional policies and news media coverage differ in their treatment of fossil fuel funding in higher education?) highlights the core of this disparity. Institutional policies adopt a circumscribed approach centred on internal governance and procedural safeguards. Only three policies explicitly mention the FF industry, with most avoiding broader societal issues such as greenwashing, climate delay, or reputational risk. They project institutional legitimacy through administrative order while ignoring the wider

political landscape. In contrast, media discourse takes a broader view, documenting how FF funding perpetuates climate delay and interrogating corporate strategies. For instance, reports have detailed the impact of FF-funded research on climate policy decision-making (Basseches et al. 2022; Lachapelle et al. 2024). Public discourse also foregrounds the FFR movement, exemplified by VU Amsterdam's refusal to collaborate with FF companies outside the Paris accords (Cohen 2023). This reflects the second wave of Ansar et al.'s (2013) divestment framework, where successful FF divestment campaigns catalyse parallel FFR initiatives. Such dynamics echo organisational decoupling (Jabbouri et al. 2019), where universities maintain formal policy structures disconnected from external pressures, allowing them to manage reputational risk without altering core funding practices, thus explaining why a dimension so salient in public discourse is largely absent from institutional policy frameworks.

Our analysis of RQ3 (How do the distinct institutional contexts of the UK and US, specifically regarding public mandates versus private endowment dependence, shape their respective approaches to fossil fuel funding?) demonstrates how this discursive gap is shaped by the differing structural characteristics of the elite institutions examined. In the US, public discourse focuses predominantly on the FF industry's role in climate delay narratives, engaging with Lamb et al. (2020) four typologies of delay. This aligns with the heavily financialised and commercialised elite private US higher education landscape (Stephens 2024), where policies often reflect a focus on financial motivations. In the UK, coverage foregrounds FFR and institutional reputation, with policies more often addressing environmental impacts, such as LSE's explicit rejection of "thermal coal mining or oil/tar sands extraction" (LSE 2021, p0.4). Given UK universities' public service mandate (Hall 2018) and heavier reliance on public funding, they may be more responsive to societal expectations around FF engagement, a pattern reflected in the lower levels of FF funding European HEIs receive- about $300 million versus $700 million for US institutions (Ferguson and Matthews 2023; Milman 2023). Barron et al. (2023) similarly find higher-ranking UK universities more likely to adopt FF divestment policies. This suggests that the divergence is not only geographic, but structural. The UK's public governance model appears to retain a channel for societal accountability that is more easily obscured within the private, market-insulated governance structures of the US Ivy League.

This divergence is revealing. It indicates how universities narrow 'policy problems' to administrative compliance, avoiding debates on divestment, greenwashing, or climate delay. Such framing explains why policies neglect FF industry capture while public contestation intensifies outside formal structures (Basseches et al. 2022). The discursive gap therefore reflects not only different priorities across policy and media but also the need for HEIs to rethink governance frameworks to address the contested dimensions of FF funding. Importantly, our analysis focuses on the content of these institutional policies, and we did not examine the practical implementation or enforcement of these policies, which may differ from their stated provisions.

### 5.3 Policy recommendations

The observed discursive gap between public debate and HEI policy represents a governance failure that could be addressed through changes in HEI policy. The following suggested recommendations could close this gap by making university policies on FF funding more

transparent, accountable, and responsive to public discourse. To achieve this, we advance work by Kinol et al. (2023) to offer insights that could inform a new framework for FF funding policies aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating the conflicts of interest that undermine academic integrity. Recognising concerns that complete dissociation from FF industries might restrict academic freedom (Peacock 2024), we align with Lowe and Chung's (2022) position that continued dependence on FF extraction ultimately poses a greater threat to academic freedom. Our study suggests aligning funding policies with university commitments to the public good, as highlighted by Hall (2018), could help mitigate reputational risks, particularly for publicly-funded UK universities and possibly open the door to collaborations akin to Cancer Research UK (Ferguson and Matthews 2023).

Rather than implementing blanket bans, which face resistance (Cohen 2022a), we recommend developing unified funding policies across institutions that extend beyond direct industry funding. Incorporating Cohen and Mann's (2022) recommendations, institutional policies should consider rejecting funding from entities that indirectly profit from FF industries, including organisations, foundations, and lending institutions. For effective implementation, institutions might follow VU Amsterdam's model of establishing dedicated oversight mechanisms and using standardised definitions such as the Global Industry Classification Standard (MSCI 2024) to ensure consistency across institutions globally. This comprehensive approach could provide a practical framework for managing FF funding while addressing institutional concerns about academic freedom and research sustainability.

### 5.4 Gift acceptance guidelines

Our findings suggest that HEIs should establish clear guidelines for accepting philanthropic donations, addressing both reputational considerations and funding allocation strategies. While our analysis reveals minimal evidence of direct concerns regarding philanthropic donations from FF industries beyond reputational risks (Gross 2023), institutions should implement safeguards when these donations are not directed toward research activities. Drawing inspiration from VU Amsterdam's FFR framework (VU 2023), institutions might consider extending restrictions to philanthropic gifts from the top 200 publicly traded FF companies and their subsidiaries, as well as firms actively engaged in FF exploration, to maintain institutional integrity and mitigate reputational risks.

### 5.5 Country-specific policies

Our policy recommendations and suggestions for gift acceptance guidelines are likely to encounter differing levels of acceptance across UK and US HEIs. In the UK, the predominance of public funding structures and the explicit public service mandate of HEIs (Hall 2018) may create greater receptivity to comprehensive funding restrictions. By contrast, Ivy-league universities - particularly those located in regions with strong FF industry ties and more right-leaning political orientations (Basseches et al. 2022) - are more heavily embedded in private sector financialisation (Kinol et al. 2023; Stephens 2024), which may foster stronger resistance to such measures. This structural difference not only reflects broader contrasts in HE systems but may also help explain the greater openness of UK institutions to publicly driven reforms, compared to the market-oriented resistance that characterises US counterparts. In the US, the decades-long legacy of corporate interests, private

donors, and wealthy alumni using their wealth and power to influence HEIs seems to have eroded a collective commitment to academic research for the public good (Stephens 2024). These differences highlight the need for country-specific approaches to policy reform that are responsive to the distinct institutional logics and political contexts of each system.

Finally, these institutional postures must be viewed as subject to temporal volatility. The governance of higher education is increasingly sensitive to electoral cycles and shifting societal norms, particularly regarding climate action. As political administrations change - most notably in the US, where university funding and oversight are frequently leveraged in broader political contests - the policies identified in this study may rapidly realign. Consequently, the divergence between UK and US approaches is not static; it will likely fluctuate as future political shifts and evolving public sentiment redefine the boundaries of acceptable corporate engagement.

### 5.6 Limitations and future research

This study focused on 24 Russell Group and 8 Ivy League universities, among the most research-intensive and prestigious institutions in the UK and US. This choice allowed for an in-depth analysis of how elite HEIs, who are often agenda-setters with strong influence on public policy, navigate FF funding. While this sample is not representative of the entire higher education sector, it provides insight into the policies and discourse of the sector's most influential institutions. Further, the Russell Group and Ivy League represent different institutional types (public and private, respectively), and future research comparing public research-intensive universities could reveal different patterns of FF funding governance.

A second limitation is the time period analysed (2012–2024) captures recent developments, meaning historical trends may be underrepresented. Conducting longitudinal analyses could provide insight into policy evolution over time.

Finally, the cross-national focus on the UK and US may limit generalisability given context-specific factors. Additionally, by focusing on private US elite institutions, this study does not capture the dynamics of US public universities (such as the University of Texas system), which could offer a more structurally comparable case to the Russell Group. Future research could broaden comparisons internationally and examine funding practices at the school or departmental level to better understand how FF funding is justified and distributed among and within different HEI units in different countries.

## 6 Conclusion

Our study reveals a critical gap between public concern and institutional response to FF funding in academia. While news discourse extensively addresses climate delay tactics, corporate influence, and conflicts of interest, institutional policies largely emphasise broader principles of academic integrity and transparency. This disconnect highlights the urgent need for HEIs to develop more comprehensive policies that directly address the specific challenges posed by FF funding.

Furthermore, we find that country-specific contexts shape institutional responses; UK institutions focus more on environmental considerations and ethical frameworks, while US institutions emphasise financial relationships and academic independence. Effective policy

solutions must therefore be tailored to specific institutional and national contexts while maintaining core principles of academic integrity and research independence.

Moreover, our findings carry implications beyond the FF industry. Recognising connections among multiple different industries that rely on petrochemicals, it is increasingly important to expand scrutiny beyond FF energy companies to include plastics companies and agrochemical companies (Kinol et al. 2025), as well as technology, agricultural and pharmaceutical industries. Future research should map these networks of corporate influence across countries and industries, and examine how corporate interests collectively shape academic discourse and research priorities.

As crucial generators of knowledge that shape societal responses to climate change and other pressing challenges (Stephens 2024), universities face growing calls to resist corporate capture. Yet resisting powerful actors- from FF companies to the pharmaceutical and tech industries to multinational food conglomerates- requires stronger public support and a strengthened commitment to serving the public good rather than corporate interests. To reclaim their authority and integrity, universities need to close the gap between their administrative silence and the urgent societal realities of the climate crisis - transforming policies from mechanisms of quiet compliance into bold drivers of academic integrity.

## Appendix A- Data Sources

| UK Documents | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **UK University (all publicly funded)** (McCabe 2023) | University policy analysed | UK News articles analysed | News source, date |
| University of Birmingham | Code of Practice for Research, 2021 | Why Are Fossil Fuel Companies Funding Climate Change Research? | The Nation, 2022 |
| University of Bristol | Research Governance and Integrity Policy, 2019 | Funding from fossil fuel industry could threaten integrity of research, academic workshop finds | Jesus College Cambridge, 2024 |
| University of Cambridge | Good Research Practice Guidelines, 2023 | UK universities take £40 m in fossil fuel funding since 2022 | The Guardian, 2023 |
| Cardiff University | Research Integrity and Governance Code of Practice, 2023<br>Research integrity - Compliance with external conflict of interest requirements, 2021 | Fossil fuel companies pay our universities to produce research that enables their destructive practices. Students at the University of Sheffield want to break this financial influence. | SOS UK, 2023 |
| Durham University | Gift Acceptance Policy, 2022<br>Research Integrity Policy and Code of Good Practice, 2023 | Cambridge university halts donations from fossil fuel groups | Financial Times, 2024 |
| University of Edinburgh | University Research Ethics Policy, 2022 | Big Oil given direct influence over university courses | openDemocracy, 2023 |
| University of Exeter | Conflict of Interest Policy, 2018 | European universities accept €260 million in fossil fuel money | Investigate Europe, 2023 |

| UK Documents | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **UK University (all publicly funded)** (McCabe 2023) | University policy analysed | UK News articles analysed | News source, date |
| University of Glasgow | Code of Good Practice in Research, 2023 | Labour and Tories fail to commit to exposing universities' secret donors | openDemocracy, 2024 |
| Imperial College London | Conflict of Interest Policy, 2019 | Cambridge university should halt funding from fossil fuel groups, report finds | Financial Times, 2024 |
| King's College London | Policy statement and procedures for the acceptance of external funding and collaboration with organisations and individuals, 2024 | University should stop accepting research funding from fossil fuel industry, report finds | Varsity, 2023 |
| University of Leeds | Conflict of Interest Policy, 2024 | British universities slammed for taking £90 m from oil companies in four years | openDemocracy, 2021 |
| University of Liverpool | Policy on Disclosure of Interest, 2023 | UK universities took £89 m from oil firms in last four years | The Guardian, 2021 |
| London School of Economics | External Funding Acceptance Policy, 2023 | Climate Research Shouldn't Be Funded by Fossil Fuels | The Nation, 2022 |
| University Of Manchester | Policy On Responsible International Research Activities And Collaborations, 2024 | Fossil Free Research Oxbridge students and academics protest unrepentant oil giants' links in university education | Cambridge Independent, 2022 |
| Newcastle University | Code of Good Practice in Research, 2012<br>Policy for Investigating Allegations of Research Misconduct, 2023 | Oxford University took at least £1.6 m last year from fossil fuel firms | The Guardian, 2022 |
| University of Nottingham | Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics, 2023 | Cambridge University students and academics occupy BP institute demanding end to fossil fuel funding | Independent, 2022 |
| University of Oxford | Guidance for accepting University research funding and donations related to fossil fuels, 2024<br>Conflict of Interest Policy, 2023 | Investigation: Top universities take £134 m from fossil fuel giants despite divestment drive | Unearthed, 2015 |
| Queen Mary University of London | Queen Mary Policy on Research Integrity, 2014 | A Dutch University Just Set a Powerful Precedent for Climate Research | The Nation, 2023 |
| | Code of Conduct and Integrity in Research, 2022 | Cambridge accepts £6 m Shell donation for oil extraction research | The Guardian, 2019 |
| University of Sheffield | Policy On Good Research And Innovation Practices, 2020 | It's like tobacco funding health research': should universities take money from fossil fuel? | The Guardian, 2018 |
| University of Southampton | Code of Conduct for Research, 2017 | Students Tell Their Universities: Keep Fossil Fuel Companies Out of Climate Research | The Nation, 2022 |
| University College London | UCL Statement on Research Integrity, 2014<br>UCL Research Funding Ethics Policy, 2024 | 'Smoking gun proof': fossil fuel industry knew of climate danger as early as 1954, documents show | The Guardian, 2024 |
| University of Warwick | Research Code of Practice, 2024 | | |

| UK Documents | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **UK University (all publicly funded)** (McCabe 2023) | University policy analysed | UK News articles analysed | News source, date |
| University of York | Code of practice and principles for good ethical governance, 2022 | | |
| **US Documents** | | | |
| **US University (all privately funded)** (U.S.News 2023) | **University policy analysed** | **US News articles analysed** | **News source, date** |
| Brown University | Conflict of Interest in Research Policy, 2024 | Op-Ed: Climate research funded by fossil fuel profits discredits universities and hurts the planet | LA Times, 2022 |
| Columbia University | Columbia University Policy On Institutional Conflict Of Interest In Research, 2014<br>Columbia University Guidelines for Situations Involving Potential Conflict of Interest Between Scholarly and Commercial Activities, 2022 | Tracing Big Oil's PR war to delay action on climate change | Harvard Gazette, 2021 |
| Cornell University | Research Integrity Policy, 2024 | When fossil fuels fund academic research | Greenpeace, 2024 |
| Dartmouth College | Criteria for Acceptance of Sponsored Activities Agreements with Disclosure Restrictions, 2013<br>Conflict of Interest Policy, 2019 | Fossil fuels should not be funding our universities | National Observer, 2024 |
| Harvard University | Harvard University Policy On Individual Financial Conflicts Of Interest For Persons Holding Faculty And Teaching Appointments, 2012 | New documents shed light on oil industry's academic support | Axios, 2024 |
| Princeton University | Conflict of Interest in Research Policy, 2024 | Stanford committee report calls for 'better guardrails' but not a blanket ban on fossil fuel industry research funding | Stanford Report, 2024 |
| University of Pennsylvania | Overview of Policy on Conflicts of Interest Related to Research, 2022 | Fossil fuel companies donated $700 m to US universities over 10 years | The Guardian, 2023 |
| Yale University | Conflict of Interest Policy, 2012 | Research or Lobbying? New Documents Reveal What Fossil Fuel Companies Are Really Paying for at Top Universities | Drilled Media, 2024 |
| | | Fossil Fuel Industry Gave Hundreds of Millions to Higher Ed | Inside Higher Ed, 2023 |
| | | Columbia Appoints Committee to Consider Questions About Fossil Fuel Funding and Research | Columbia News, 2024 |

| UK Documents | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **UK University (all publicly funded)** (McCabe 2023) | University policy analysed | UK News articles analysed | News source, date |
| | | Industrial Research Chairs working on fossil fuels received 300 times more money than similar alternative energy projects according to Greenpeace Canada report | Greenpeace, 2024 |
| | | Louisiana's flagship university lets oil firms influence research – for a price | The Guardian, 2024 |
| | | UGS debates fossil fuel companies funding research | Stanford Daily, 2024 |
| | | US Universities At The Center Of Fossil Fuel "Money For Research" Scheme | CleanTechnica, 2024 |
| | | How Fossil Fuel Money Skews University Climate and Energy Research | OneGreenPlanet, 2023 |
| | | Stanford disappoints critics of fossil fuel donations by hiring PR firm with big oil ties | The Guardian, 2024 |
| | | Columbia has received funding from fossil fuel companies for decades. That money keeps flowing. | Columbia Spectator, 2023 |
| | | Oil Money Undermines Academic Autonomy | Inside Higher Ed, 2022 |
| | | When Divestment Isn't Enough | The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2022 |
| | | First-of-Its-Kind Report Details Hundreds of Millions Pumped Into Academia by Big Oil | Common Dreams, 2023 |
| | | Stanford's New School of Sustainability Is a Gift to Fossil Fuel Companies | The Nation, 2022 |
| | | University committee formed to review fossil fuel funding of research | Stanford Report, 2022 |
| | | The Pernicious Influence of Big Oil on America's Universities | The New Republic, 2020 |
| | | Princeton Will Stop Taking Oil Money. Now the Pressure Is on Harvard, MIT, and Columbia. | The New Republic, 2022 |
| | | MIT's Sloan School Launches Ambitious Climate Center to Aid Policymakers | Inside Climate News, 2024 |
| | | New Joint Bicameral Staff Report Reveals Big Oil's Campaign of Climate Denial, Disinformation, and Doublespeak | United States Senate Committee on the Budget, 2024 |
| | | Sunrise Brown calls on University to dissociate from fossil fuel industry at ACURM meeting | Brown Daily Herald, 2024 |
| | | Stanford oil and gas research funding ban still under review | The College Fix, 2024 |

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**Consent for publication** Not applicable.

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