

Opening Words for a LUNZ Hub conference: Land Use for Net Zero, Nature and People
Manchester, January 20-21, 2026

The time is now, and here we are.

Little is certain,
but what is certain is that the sun has risen
the air is earth's breathing -
a wintry breath - and we are here,
to gather, together.

I was wondering: what if,
instead of today following yesterday,
this year following last,
we've arrived here from the future?

☺ ... bear with me, it's just a play on time ...

What if we are here, today
with stories of oceans, birds,
farms, and forests, thriving.

Somehow, we got it right:
the tough decisions, finding a way
through the sweet, the sour
the pain, the gains.

Imagine that: we can, and we do ... we did it!
What tools would we need today?

Let's start with honesty.

There is trouble, the going is rough,
and we cannot create solutions by dreaming.

Utopia is a fleeting cloud
mirrored in a lake
before a raindrop falls.

Let's be honest, about the rain.
Let's be honest, about the storms.
Let's be honest, and proud, about success, where things work.

And let's hold tight, not for fear of change
but with commitment to the task.

We'll need courage: to set a course,
to try on new ideas,
to challenge constraints of the mind.

We can choose a new compass,
read a different kind of map -
navigating less by problems
than by acts of kindness:
more life, less loss.

Now is the time to be good ancestors,
laying out plans that go beyond
'we the people' to 'we the planet'.

It is now the time for us to be expansive in our thinking,
in our care, our imagination, and responsibility.

Feet Firm. Minds light.
Grounded, connected, brave,
knowing today shapes our tomorrows.

The time is now, and here we are.

Harriet Fraser

Context

This poem was written to open a workshop exploring options for changing land use to achieve Net Zero, whilst ensuring positive futures for nature and people. This is one in a series of workshops being run by the LUNZ Hub Net Zero Futures Platform team, whose objective is to establish a comprehensive set of plausible and innovative steps or pathways required to reach Net Zero, while delivering co-benefits for nature and people.

Policymakers, practitioners and researchers from the four UK nations met for two days. Together they reviewed modelling results for country-specific pathways that quantify potential impacts, co-benefits, and trade-offs across climate, nature and social dimensions. Participants worked together to refine the pathways by defining specific actions, timelines and responsibilities needed to deliver a sustainable and just transition.

Ahead of the workshop participants were invited to continue the phrase: "It is now time for us to be ..."
Their responses, combined with responses from participants at the LUNZ Hub Big Tent *Resonance* event in Cumbria (2025), were used as inspiration for the poem.

The phrase is an extract from an article written by author Ben Okri:

"It is now time for us to be the most creative we have ever been, the most far-sighted, the most practical, the most conscious and selfless. The stakes have never been, and will never be, higher. What is called for here is a special kind of love for the world."

From *Artists must confront the climate crisis – we must write as if these are the last days*
Ben Okri, writing in *The Guardian*, Nov 12, 2021