

TEACH THE FUTURE

1.0 Introducing Teach the Future

Teach the Future is the UK Student Climate Network (UKSCN) and Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS-UK) joint campaign to repurpose the education system around the climate emergency and ecological crisis. As students studying across the UK, we believe the majority of teaching and learning throughout the entirety of our education system is misaligned from the systemic changes urgently required to make our society sustainable. Our education system routinely fails to educate, prepare and equip us, and our fellow students, for the climate emergency and ecological crisis. Our campaign builds on the National Union of Students' (NUS) work on education for sustainable development in tertiary education and replaces UKSCN's original ask to reform the national curriculum. As education is a devolved matter we have initially tailored our asks to England, unless stated as a national recommendation. We have started with England because the Scottish and Welsh Governments have taken some progressive action on this agenda already, through [Learning for Sustainability](#), [Curriculum for Excellence](#) and [Vision 2030](#) in Scotland, and the [Future Generations Act](#) in Wales. We are unaware of any meaningful action on this agenda in Northern Ireland, but the lack of a sitting Assembly until recently has made it harder for us to progress our asks there at this time. All four nations need to do much more on this agenda, as evidenced by the below research, and our analysis of the problems, which generally apply across the UK. We intend to develop nation-specific versions of Teach the Future soon.

2.0 Research

The following UK-wide research studies helped influence our thinking:

- NUS [attitudes towards sustainability survey](#) (7,800 responses, first year students in university, UK wide, Nov 2017): 57% of students want to learn more about sustainable development;
- Green Schools Project / NUS [pupil survey](#) (3,000 responses, upper primary and secondary, mostly England, Dec 2018): Just 4% of pupils surveyed feel that they know a lot about climate change; 42% of young people aged 9-18 say they have learnt a little, hardly anything or nothing about the environment at school; 68% want to learn more about the environment and climate change; 49% would like to be more involved in projects or activities that help the environment.
- UKSCN / Oxfam [teachers survey](#) (350 responses, primary and secondary, UK wide, May 2019): 75% of teachers feel they haven't received adequate training to educate students about climate change; 69% of teachers think there should be more teaching about climate change in UK schools.
- [YouGov poll](#) (2,579 adults, January 2020): 71% said learning about climate change should be part of the school curriculum.

3.0 What are the problems we are seeking to address?

The Teach the Future team consulted with a range of people working in the education system across the UK, at all levels of the education system, as well as with academics, and experts working on education in the main environmental and sustainability charities. The following is a precis of what we understand to be the problems with the education system in relation to how it is preparing us for the climate emergency and ecological crisis:

- 3.1 Despite strong student demand, the climate emergency and ecological crisis is not regarded as a learning entitlement;
- 3.2 There is no shared understanding, or established pathway, for how learning about sustainability should develop, in a progressive sense, through the key stages, from early years through to adult education;
- 3.3 The outcomes that educational institutions are measured by present a major barrier. In secondary schools, the focus is on passing exams, rather than preparing us for the future we face. In universities, our success is usually measured by our starting salary, not the social good we go on to achieve. This is compounded by the c£50k debt we graduate with, due to tuition fees, which incentivises work that pays well over work that does good.
- 3.4 Although current English education policy sets out to provide the maximum amount of autonomy for what schools teach, teachers state that they do not have sufficient knowledge about the climate emergency and ecological crisis to confidently teach about it beyond the minimum curriculum specification;
- 3.5 Teacher training courses in England typically do not prepare trainee teachers to teach about the climate emergency and ecological crisis, and it is not adequately reflected in professional standards;
- 3.6 Teaching about sustainability requires contributions from across disciplines. This is more prevalent in primary and tertiary than secondary, in part because teachers in secondary find it more difficult to collaborate across subject boundaries, being more results-driven and facing greater time pressures. As a result, there is a discontinuous learning journey on sustainability from primary to tertiary, which leads to a loss of student engagement and interest;
- 3.7 Learning about the climate emergency and ecological crisis tends to be restricted to science and geography in secondary, and related disciplines in tertiary, despite most subjects being able to contribute to our understanding of these issues;
- 3.8 Geography is not a compulsory subject at GCSE, despite having important climate-related content;
- 3.9 Some schools are making good use of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lesson time to teach about the climate emergency and ecological crisis in the absence of being able to teach it in a more systemic way;
- 3.10 Vocational courses in colleges urgently need overhauling to reskill the workforce to deliver the transition to a low carbon economy (e.g. retraining



plumbers away from gas fired boilers to solar, heat pumps, battery installation, etc.);

- 3.11 There has longstanding move away from outdoor education, as evidenced by the RSPB's work on connection to nature, and the notion of nature deficit disorder. This is an issue in other countries too, as highlighted by the US campaign No Child Left Inside. This is compounded by the rise of digital technology and social media, which often outcompetes being in nature. Learning in, and about, nature, especially at an early age, helps nurture a sense of wonder, fascination and curiosity, which reinforce innate desires to conserve and protect what we have;
- 3.12 Other educational agendas, such as technology, financial management and character, have much higher priority for Government than the climate emergency and ecological crisis, even though all those issues pale in significance given the catastrophic social, economic and environmental consequences facing us through runaway global heating;
- 3.13 Our educational institutions are typically not acknowledging, or sufficiently acting upon, the growing youth voice on the climate emergency and ecological crisis. There is great sympathy for our strikes, our cause and our plight, but as yet no meaningful or coordinated attempts to work with us on solutions in relation to our education;
- 3.14 A lack of funding is often cited as a barrier by young people who want to take more action on the environment. This was reinforced at the World Economic Forum in 2020 when conservationist Jane Goodall said "The young people know what needs to be done, but very often there aren't the resources for them to actually do it".
- 3.15 Many schools, colleges and universities do little or nothing to encourage us to contribute to, or lead on, sustainability in terms of operational and estates issues. Sustainability is often done for us, rather than with or through us. This is a missed learning opportunity;
- 3.16 The buildings and estates that we are educated in and on are often environmentally inefficient, wasteful and fully reliant on fossil fuels. These assets are our subliminal curriculum and form part of our learning on sustainability.

4.0 What are we asking Government to do?

ASK 1: A government commissioned review into how the whole of the English formal education system is preparing students for the climate emergency and ecological crisis

A review commissioned by the Department for Education, led by an independent Chair, endorsed by UKSCN and NUS representatives, supported by a panel of students, into how the English formal education system in its entirety (primary through to adult education) is preparing students to mitigate, abate and end the climate emergency and ecological crisis. It will need tight terms of reference and ideally report within a year, in keeping with the urgent nature of the climate emergency. The review should propose detailed and costed recommendations for Government and autonomous educational institutions, including universities. All stages of the review should be developed in consultation with all relevant interest, stakeholder and representative groups. We believe the review should



include whether learning about the climate emergency and ecological crisis is a learning entitlement, what is the most appropriate learning pathway (taking into consideration the very real problem of eco-anxiety), and how any such learning pathway can join up through the various forms of education. We will call for similar reviews in the devolved nations soon.

ASK 2: Inclusion of the climate emergency and ecological crisis in teacher training and a new professional teaching qualification

As is the case in Scotland, learning about the climate emergency and ecological crisis should be a compulsory part of teaching training courses. We would like to see this detailed in the Government's teacher standards for England and the Initial Teacher Training Content Framework. We would also like to see a new National Professional Qualification for teachers on the climate emergency and ecological crisis, including considerations relating to eco-anxiety. These actions should not wait for the review in Ask 1 and should be done immediately.

ASK 3: An English Climate Emergency Education Act

Our third is inspired by the US Defence Education Act, which was the huge, ultimately successful, investment in their Education system on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as part of the space race.

We are asking for an English Climate Emergency Education Act; a symbolically important new act of Parliament, sitting above the various pieces of existing legislation, stating an expectation on education providers at all levels to deliver teaching and learning on the climate emergency, climate justice (the social injustice issues pertaining from global heating) and ecological crisis, and providing substantial new funding to enable this to happen at pace.

We have drafted the legislation and think it is the first ever education legislation to have been written by pupils and students – you can read it [here](#).

This funding provided by the Act would allow for:

- A comprehensive learning programme for existing teachers and lecturers, and other key educational institution staff, on the science of the climate emergency and ecological crisis, the systems changes required to abate them, including provision of teaching resources at all levels. This would include training to enable these staff members to identify eco-anxiety and support pupils suffering from eco-anxiety;
- A national Climate Education Information Institute to disseminate scientific information to educators about climate change, its effects and measures of prevention. This will include teaching resources as well as continuous professional development (CPD) materials so schools can maintain up to date knowledge on the issues;
- A national programme of vocational training through the development of national centres of excellence to promote the reskilling of the workforce in line with the green skills requirements of industrial strategy;
- A national programme for research into the impact and outcomes of sustainability learning in terms of learning outcomes, attainment, resilience and wellbeing;
- A national programme of outdoor education and connection to nature linked to learning about the climate emergency and ecological crisis;



- An English climate emergency youth voice grant fund, so that youth voice climate boards can be established in all education providers, local authorities and NHS trusts. See Appendix one for more information;
- Establishment of a Youth Climate Endowment Fund to fund youth-led climate and environmental social action enabling students in every educational institution to engage their peers, teachers and parents in practical, local action to abate the climate emergency and ecological crisis. See Appendix two for more information.

The act would also impose a new duty on schools to ensure they designate a senior member of staff as a climate co-ordinator, responsible for implementing their new duties, and create a general duty on the Office for Students with regard to teaching and learning about the climate emergency and ecological crisis.

Importantly, the act would also ensure that the Government puts our educational buildings to the front of the queue to be retrofitted to net-zero standards through the national infrastructure plan. If our education system is to teach students about sustainability, the buildings they learn within must be sustainable, because of the importance of the subliminal curriculum to learning. The act would also commit the funding to make this happen, ensuring all new state-funded educational buildings are net-zero from 2022; all existing state-funded educational buildings retrofitted to net-zero by 2030. You can read our costings for this work [here](#) and the cover note to our bill [here](#). There is further contextual information in Appendix three.

5.0 Version control

- 25 January 2020: Amended sentence on Northern Ireland to reflect assembly is now sitting; updated research with new Jan 2020 YouGov poll; added a new bullet (3.14) on lack of funding being a barrier; changed 'demands' to 'asks' throughout to strike a more conciliatory tone; amended Ask 2 to include ITT and NPQ, as was just teacher standards; amended Ask 3 by tightening up the wording in the bullet points and reducing the number by merging them; amended Ask 5 so it refers to youth social action; amended Ask 6 net zero from 2020 to 2022.
- 11 May 2020: We reframed asks 3-6 as a single ask and appended the detailed information; removed the 'or' from 'and/or' in the Government's teacher standards for England and/or the Initial Teacher Training Content Framework; added CPD to the remit of the Climate Education Information Institute.

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Appendix 1: A national climate emergency youth voice grant fund

The Netherlands funds youth and sustainability charities to train and support young people to sit on youth advisory panels on the climate emergency and ecological crisis within public sector organisations. A similar UK-wide fund should be established so local authorities, multi-academy trusts, colleges, universities and NHS trusts can create youth voice forums to advise on repurposing education around the climate emergency and ecological crisis. This should happen immediately.

APPENDIX 2: A national Youth Climate and Ecological Endowment Fund

A new national endowment should be created to fund youth-led social action on the climate emergency and ecological crisis. The traditional model for Government endowments is to ringfence a financial fine windfall, or money from dormant bank accounts, and repurpose it towards a defined cause. The Educational Endowment Fund (2011, £125m) seeks to improve schools in low income areas; the Youth Endowment Fund (2018, £200m) seeks to prevent young people getting into violent crime; the Uniformed Youth Fund (£5m, 2018) seeks to get more young people involved in uniformed youth groups. This new endowment should be steered by a panel of young people and managed by a coalition of youth-led charities. Educational organisations should be eligible to apply for funding in order to distribute it to young people and students at the local level for local youth-led social action on the climate emergency and ecological crisis. The endowment should be invested in new renewable energy assets, in keeping with the purpose of the scheme. It might be that leading businesses and philanthropists decide to contribute to the fund so that it grows over time. An endowment of this nature would provide a useful stop gap measure alongside any Government commissioned review of legislative work to ensure that students do not get frustrated by the slow progress of with governmental processes. It is important to allocate a substantial amount to any new climate endowment (in our view £500m) so as to demonstrate the Government's recognition of the size of the challenge we face, and commitment to catalysing immediate action from as many people as possible as soon as possible, which is exactly what the science says we need right now.

APPENDIX 3: All new state-funded educational buildings should be net-zero from 2022; all existing state-funded educational buildings net-zero by 2030

Our educational buildings are more than safe spaces for us to learn, they are themselves an education resource. It is a scandal that so many of our nurseries, schools, college and university buildings are powered by fossil fuels, have no or hardly any renewables, are poorly insulated, have inefficient and outdated lighting and controls, an absence of sufficient natural light and limited natural vegetation and biodiversity enhancements in the grounds. Our state-funded educational estate should be a living laboratory for us to learn about how to work and live sustainability. It is shocking that our educational institutions are still putting up



brand new deeply unsustainable buildings, many of which will need to be retrofitted or replaced very soon if we are to meet our national net-zero ambitions. The Government have committed us to be net-zero by 2050, but the science says we need to go much further and faster, and we think the educational estate should be an infrastructural priority given the learning gain benefit. As such we are calling for Government to put substantial new capital investment into the education system. The Government should ensure that all new educational institution buildings that are 50% or more funded by public money are net-zero from 2022, and that all state-funded educational buildings are retrofitted to be net-zero by 2030. The Government should influence other agencies that distribute government funding for capital projects in education, such as funding and research councils, local authorities, and NHS Trusts, encouraging or mandating them to support this target.

