Student Opinion: An Environment Act for the UK

October 2018
Summary
Student Opinion | An Environment Act for the UK

In October 2018, NUS asked over 2500 students what they thought about issues related to the protection of the environment, through laws and policy and through their own personal action. Here's what they told us...

Issues senior politicians are not discussing enough are...
- Climate change - 27%
- Poverty - 27%
- Education - 26%

Issues senior politicians are discussing too much are...
- Brexit - 52%
- Immigration - 36%
- Conflict and wars - 18%

When the UK leaves the EU it should pass environmental laws that provide levels of protection that are...
- 50% Higher than current EU laws
- 38% Same as current EU laws
- 2% Lower than current EU laws

Most important issues which could be tackled by any new environmental protection laws that may be introduced in the UK after Brexit include...
- Stopping climate change - 49%
- Reducing avoidable waste - 47%

Most common actions to help protect the environment are...
- Signing a petition - 58%
- Taking personal action e.g. changed diet or cut down on packaging - 55%

69% say there should be more opportunities for people like them to take action to help protect the environment

12% say they are part of a club or group that helps the environment outside formal education

If a general election were to be held tomorrow, respondents would vote...
- Labour 38%
- Conservative 12%
- Green 8%
- Lib Dem 7%
- Don't know 23%

69% would be likely to vote for a political party that increased action to protect the environment
Research objectives and methodology
This report presents the findings of a survey amongst HE and FE students studying in the UK to understand their views on issues related environmental policy to inform NUS’ work in this area.

The online survey was advertised via the NUS Extra / TOTUM student discount cardholder database as a survey about topical issues in the UK to avoid bias towards respondents with strong pro or anti-environmental attitudes and beliefs.

A final sample of 2534 was achieved in October 2018, with respondents offered entry to a prize draw to win £150. The survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Within the report, a number of questions have been cross-tabulated with other questions in order to understand how responses vary according to survey participants with different characteristics or views. Where there are any statistical significant differences between answers, they are reported where applicable and to large enough base size (n>30) and are valid at confidence level of 99%. They are highlighted in speech bubbles throughout the report, for example:
Environment and politics
The three issues that respondents were most likely to say that politicians did not discuss enough were poverty (27%), climate change (27%) and education (26%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of nature and loss of plant and animal species</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare and wellbeing</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality between diverse groups of people in society</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic opportunity and employment</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal welfare</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet privacy and security</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brexit</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict and wars</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International development</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 2528 respondents. Balance: no response

B1. Here are some issues that may concern different people. Which issues, if any, do you think senior politicians are not discussing enough, and should discuss more?
Over half of respondents felt that senior politicians are spending too much time discussing Brexit (52%). 1 in 3 (36%) say they are spending too much time talking about immigration.

Base: 2520 respondents. Balance: no response

B2. Thinking about the same issues... Which, if any, do you think senior politicians are discussing too much, and should spend less time discussing?
Half of respondents (50%) felt that the UK should pass laws providing a higher level of protection than the current EU laws. 4 in 10 (38%) felt the laws should be providing the same level of protection as the current laws.

Don’t know: 10%

The UK should pass laws providing a HIGHER level of protection than the current EU laws.

The UK should pass laws providing the SAME level of protection as the current EU laws.

The UK should pass laws providing a LOWER level of protection than the current EU laws.

Significantly more likely to be UK students: 50%

Significantly more likely to be EU and male students: 38%

Base: 2528 respondents. Balance: no response

B3. Many issues related to protecting the environment in the UK are currently covered by European Union laws and regulations. When the UK leaves the EU, these laws and regulations will no longer apply, and the UK will have its own environmental protection laws. Do you think...
The issues that are of most importance when considering which ones could be tackled by any new environmental protection laws that may be introduced are stopping climate change (mentioned as being most important by 32% of respondents) and reducing avoidable waste (30% rate this their number 1 issue).
A range of environmental issues were spontaneously mentioned as other issues which should be considered when introducing new environmental protection laws when the UK leaves the EU including protection of wildlife, reducing reliance on plastics and protecting and improving access to natural areas. The most commonly referenced themes are identified in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protecting animals and wildlife</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>“Wildlife should also be considered a environmental problem because animals are losing their place to live. Animals are a crucial component to living sustainably and should be protected at all costs. Take a look at most animals/insects and notice the large amount of endangered and threatened species.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of plastics / packaging</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>“Stopping plastic carrier bags and changing plastic bottles to cardboard like cartons of juice are contained in and stopping the amount of plastic that is used for an unnecessary reasons.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting and improving access to natural areas</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>“Companies building on brown field sites should be more encouraged rather then building on green field sites which in turn destroys habitats or farmers field and overall contributes to global warming.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution (air, land, water)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>“Air pollution should be a concern as the air we breath can be very dangerous to ones health.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative energy sources to fossil fuels</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>“Ban fracking and phase out the use of fossil fuels.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing food production and diets</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>“Economical and environmentally friendly farming methods with stacking farms including more influence on a vegetable heavy diet- as a nation I think that we eat far too much red meat.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 500 responses have been coded. Balance: No response
Voting intentions and preferences
Over 2 in 3 (69%) respondents say they would be highly or very likely to vote for a political party that pledged to increase action to improve protection for the environment. A similar proportion (65%) would vote for an MP who personally pledged to increase action to improve protection for the environment.

An MP who personally pledged to increase action to improve protection for the environment (n=2473)

- Significantly more likely to be male students: 26%
- Significantly more likely to be FT and non-EU students: 22%

A political party that pledged to increase action to improve protection for the environment (n=2491)

- Significantly more likely to be female students: 26%
- Significantly more likely to be FT and non-EU students: 20%

Base: in brackets. Balance: no response

C1. Please tell us how likely, or unlikely, you would be to vote for the following options:
Almost 4 in 10 (38%) said they would vote Labour if a general election were held tomorrow. 12% would vote Conservative. However, a quarter (23%) are uncertain who they would vote for.

C2. If a general election were to be held tomorrow which party, if any, would you vote for?
Almost three quarters (71%) agreed that there should be a vote on the final Brexit deal. 20% however, said they should not be a vote on the final Brexit deal.


C3. Do you think the public should or should not be given a vote on the final deal for Britain’s exit from the EU once it has been agreed?
Environmental engagement
Almost 6 in 10 respondents say they had signed a petition to try and help protect the environment (58%), a similar proportion (55%) had taken personal action (e.g. adopting a vegetarian/vegan diet, or cutting down on single-use packaging).

D1. Which, if any, of the following actions have you taken related to protecting the environment?
7 in 10 (69%) agreed that there should be more opportunities to take action to help protect the environment.

Base: 2521 respondents. Balance: no response

D2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “There should be more opportunities for people like me to take action to help protect the environment.”
1 in 8 (12%) respondents say they do not participate in any volunteering activities. Of those who do the most popular activities are sports clubs or teams (45%), Scouts, Guides or other youth groups (33%) and art, drama, dance or music club/groups (31%).

- Sports club or team: 45%
- Scouts, Guides or other youth group: 33%
- Art, drama, dance or music club/group: 31%
- Club or group that helps my local community: 26%
- Other volunteering opportunity: 23%
- Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme: 20%
- Club or group that helps the environment: 12%
- National Citizen Service: 11%
- Army Cadet Force or Corps: 7%
- None of these - I have never volunteered: 12%

Base: 2512 respondents. Balance: no response
Demographics
### Key demographics & characteristics

#### Gender
- **Woman**: 53%
- **Man**: 45%
- **Non-binary**: 1%
- **In another way**: 0%
- **Prefer not to say**: 1%

#### Age
- **16-17**: 13%
- **18-22**: 46%
- **23-29**: 15%
- **30-39**: 14%
- **40-49**: 7%
- **50-59**: 4%
- **60+**: 1%
- **I would prefer not to say**: 0%

#### Level of study
- **Full time**: 76%
- **Part time**: 8%
- **Distance learner**: 8%

#### Nationality
- **UK citizen studying in the UK**: 84%
- **International student from within the EU studying in the UK**: 7%
- **International student from outside the EU studying in the UK**: 8%
Key demographics & characteristics: Study location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>0%</td>
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Student Opinion: Environment Act

For more information about this research please contact Rachel Drayson, Insight manager (Sustainability) at Rachel.Drayson@nus.org.uk