

## Our case for investing in climate education

Thirty years ago global warming was raised as a global threat at the UN General Assembly. After three decades of inaction, the world has finally woken up to the climate crisis, thanks to the efforts and actions of students like us.

We now urgently need your help, as parliamentarians, to ensure the education system is at the heart of the Government's plan to tackle climate change, so our generation can lead society to safety.

We are all aged 13-26 and in full time education. Despite the fact we all come from different types of schools, colleges and universities, our experience of the formal education system is the same. We have barely been taught anything about the climate emergency and ecological crisis. Yes, GCSE science teaches us that climate change is happening, but we already know that, and geography, which goes into more detail on the solutions, is only an optional subject. So much of what we learn, at all levels, is irrelevant to the uncertain future we are inheriting. Our education is out of touch with the future we face.

Many of us involved in the youth climate movement know considerably more about the climate crisis than our teachers. Last year our survey of 350 teachers found that 75% of them feel they haven't received adequate training to teach climate change. This was also evidenced by our pupil survey, which revealed that just 4% of 3,000 pupils surveyed felt they knew a lot about climate change.

Preparing our generation with the necessary knowledge and understanding of the climate emergency and ecological crisis, and ensuring we have the skills and resilience to adapt, is fundamental and should be as important as numeracy and literacy. We need to link up the different forms of education so there is consistency of learning on this, and we urgently need help dealing with eco-anxiety. Our schools, colleges and universities should be retrofitted to net zero as a national infrastructure priority, so we can learn how to live sustainably.

We can learn from the US. As part of the space race, the National Defence Education Act was passed in 1958, providing funding and a plan to mainstream STEM across all forms of formal education. The average age of the team in the control tower on the day of the moon landing was just 28, showing just what can happen when there is a targeted investment in education, combined with a compelling vision and the can-do attitude of younger people.

In relation to the climate emergency and ecological crisis, we have the can-do attitude and vision, but are being massively held back by our education system.

In November 2020 the UK will host UN COP26. We call upon our Government to work with us to urgently develop an English Climate Emergency Education Plan so that we can go into COP showing the world how we have put our education system front and centre of our net zero goals.

We have done our research and think such a plan should include:

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 (in the gift of the Secretary of State);
2. Inclusion of the climate emergency and ecological crisis in teacher training and a new professional teaching qualification (in the gift of the Secretary of State);
3. An English Climate Emergency Education Act that:
  - a. obligates education providers to teach the climate emergency and ecological crisis, and to have a member of their leadership team responsible for it;
  - b. provides new funding for: the upskilling of existing teachers and lecturers; development of teaching resources; vocational centres of excellence on low carbon skills; establishing youth voice climate boards; more youth-led climate and environmental social action; support with eco-anxiety;
  - c. requires, and provides new funding, to ensure all new state-funded educational buildings are net-zero from 2022, and all existing state-funded educational buildings are net-zero by 2030.

We have taken the liberty to work up a draft bill that could become an English Climate Emergency Education Act and have appended it to this letter. We ask you, as parliamentarians, to read our bill and let us know how you can help us. Yes, there is a significant financial cost attached to our proposals, and you might well ask can we afford to do this? To this we politely ask can we afford not to do this, given we are the generation who have no option but to transform society and adapt to living in a hotter and more dangerous world? Our generation needs a transformational education if we are to succeed.

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