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## **1.0 Introducing Teach the Future Scotland**

Current climate education is inadequate. Students aren't being prepared to face the effects of climate change, or taught to understand the solutions. We can change this.

Teach the Future Scotland is a student-volunteer led organisation, which empowers students to change the education system. Supported by [Fridays for Future Scotland \(FFF Scotland\)](#) and [National Union of Students Scotland \(NUS Scotland\)](#), we are working on a joint campaign to repurpose the whole Scottish education system around the climate emergency, climate justice and ecological crisis.

As students studying in Scotland, we believe the majority of teaching and learning throughout the entirety of the Scottish education system remains misaligned from the systemic changes urgently required to make a just and sustainable society.

Despite the admirable policy commitments in 'Vision 2030+'<sup>1</sup> and action plan<sup>2</sup>, the commitment to low-carbon skills in 'Protecting Scotland's Future: the Government's Programme for Scotland 2019-2020'<sup>3</sup>, and the progressive work of Learning for Sustainability Scotland (LfSS)<sup>4</sup>, we have to report that, unfortunately, our education

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<sup>1</sup> [Vision 2030+ | Education Scotland](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Learning For Sustainability Action Plan](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Protecting Scotland's Future: the Government's Programme for Scotland 2019-2020 - Publication - Strategy/plan](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Learning for Sustainability Scotland](#)

system routinely fails to educate, prepare and equip us, and our fellow students, to abate and stop the climate emergency and ecological crisis and to deliver climate justice<sup>5</sup>.

In our view, the five strategic recommendations of Vision 2030+<sup>6</sup> are all a long way from being fully and routinely implemented. Given the urgency of the climate and ecological crisis, and the racial injustices of the climate emergency, it is unacceptable to rely on incremental progress to full implementation leading up to 2030. Our understanding is that the Vision 2030+ commitments are largely un-funded and rely on goodwill and collaborative action for implementation, which is also incompatible with urgent action. We cannot rely on the goodwill of some benefactors or the sacrifices made by working-class people to fund our planet's survival.

Reforming education around the climate emergency and ecological crisis must be a well-funded strategic priority for the Scottish Government immediately, with full implementation of the Vision 2030+ plan being delivered by 2025, at the latest. We want to work in collaboration with students and other organisations for the best possible future of education in Scotland. We have been in contact with, and support Learning for Sustainability Scotland's work with the Children's Parliament<sup>7</sup> and the Scottish Youth Parliament review which is due to be published in March 2023. This is further evidence that our education needs to be changed, and we are not the only group seeking this.

Our revised campaign builds on our previous asks (2019–2022) and FFF Scotland's original demand that the climate crisis is prioritised in education, and builds on the education for sustainable development work in tertiary education led by NUS. We have met with members of government and local councils to consult on the viability of our asks. Our asks have been developed by young people who are currently in, or have recently left formal education in Scotland. Teach the Future Scotland is aligned with the Teach the Future England campaign<sup>8</sup>. As education is a devolved matter, our asks are tailored to Scotland, unless stated as a national recommendation, which we would suggest the four UK nations collaborate to deliver.

## 2.0 Research

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

- [Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems](#) (Policy paper)
- [Keep Scotland Beautiful Impact Report 2022](#)

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<sup>5</sup> [Climate change disproportionately affects the most marginalised communities](#) in society, and are already causing devastation for countries in the Global South, who are still suffering from historical colonialism. Climate justice involves not only environmental action but social justice.

<sup>6</sup> [Vision 2030+ Report: Concluding report of the Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group | Self-evaluation | National Improvement Hub](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Children's Parliament: Learning for Sustainability](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Teach the Future England](#)

- [YouGov poll](#) (2,579 adults, UK-wide, January 2020): 71% of respondents said learning about climate change should be part of the school curriculum, up to 79% in Scotland.
- [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) (to determine what targets are already in place)
- [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;
- 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.
- [Censuswide Scotland](#) (1,002 adults, Scotland, May 2019): 79% of Scots want more general education on climate change, with 78% and 72% looking to the UK and Scottish Governments respectively to raise awareness.
- [RCE Contributions to a More Sustainable World: Celebrating Five Years of Innovative Projects on Education for Sustainable Development \(2015-2019\)](#)
- The [Net Zero School Strategy and Climate Ready Classrooms](#) highlights the need for interactive and engaging education in our schools. Students, at all levels of education, should be involved with their classroom experience. This allows for them to be more empowered by the material and also supports the continuous development of our education system.

### 3.0 What are the problems we are seeking to address?

The Teach the Future Scotland team formally<sup>9</sup> and informally consulted with a range of students and staff studying and working in the education system in Scotland, from primary through to tertiary (including teachers and organisations such as EAUC Scotland and Learning for Sustainability Scotland). The following is a summary from these consultations of what we understand to be the problems with how the education system in Scotland is preparing us to tackle the climate emergency and ecological crisis and deliver climate justice:

**3.1** The entitlement to learning for sustainability in Scotland<sup>10</sup> is not widely known about by students and teachers and is not regarded as important by most educators. It also does not cover tertiary education, which is where most leadership education happens;

**3.2** There is no stated or established pathway or plan for how learning about sustainability should develop through Scottish education, from early years through to adult education;

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<sup>9</sup> [Teach the Future Teacher research 2020](#)

<sup>10</sup> [What is Curriculum for Excellence? | Curriculum for Excellence | Policy drivers | Policy for Scottish education | Scottish education system | Education Scotland](#)

**3.3** The main outcomes that educational institutions are measured by currently present a major barrier. In Scottish secondary schools, the focus is on us passing exams, rather than actually preparing us for the future we face. As university students, our success is often measured by our starting salary, rather than the social and environmental good we go on to achieve;

**3.4** Many of our teachers and lecturers have told us that they do not have sufficient knowledge about the climate emergency and ecological crisis to confidently teach about it beyond the minimum curriculum specification. Most of the c60,000 teachers in Scotland were not taught this as part of their teacher education and have not been re-skilled or retrained. As such, the quality and transformational outcomes of the sustainability education we receive is dependent on whether teachers and lecturers are passionate enough about the cause to have self-educated;

**3.5** Whilst we welcome inclusion of learning for sustainability in the General Teaching Council for Scotland's professional standards for teachers, and the Professional Standards for College Lecturers, many of the teacher education courses delivered in Scotland have not been updated or reviewed to include substantive content on the climate emergency, climate justice and the ecological crisis;

**3.6** Teaching about sustainability requires contributions from across subject disciplines. This seems to happen more in primary and tertiary than secondary, in part because the curriculum for secondary students is organised in silos to facilitate examinations, the study of Highers (16 to 18), and then entry to HE. This impedes the commitments to interdisciplinary learning in the Vision 2030+ plan and the stated flexibility in the Curriculum for Excellence. The result is a discontinuous learning journey on sustainability from primary to tertiary, which leads to a loss of engagement and interest;

**3.7** Learning about the climate emergency and ecological crisis tends to be restricted to the sciences and geography in secondary, and related disciplines in tertiary, despite most subjects being able to contribute to our understanding of these issues. As such, sustainability is often seen by students, teachers and lecturers as something for scientists or geographers, rather than something that is relevant to every student and that all students must understand. We would like to see educators in Scottish secondary and tertiary institutions treat sustainability as an educational principle, much as equality is, rather than a subject or discipline;

**3.8** The coverage of climate change in the sciences and geography at secondary level is both limited and insufficient;

**3.9** Geography is not a compulsory subject at National Level (NAT 4/5), despite it containing useful climate-related content;

**3.10** Many Scottish universities offer bolt-on modules on sustainability, rather than integrating it into core course content. This risks sustainability being perceived as an optional extra rather than something that is integral to a subject or profession;

**3.11** Although the Scottish Qualifications Authority has rewritten its guidance to include learning for sustainability, this is only applied to new subjects and those up for review or renewal, rather than the change having forced a comprehensive review of all subjects.



This means there will be a significant time lag in implementing the curriculum change that is urgently needed;

**3.12** Most of the professional and chartered bodies that accredit Scottish tertiary education course content appear not to assess or require relevant content on the climate emergency or ecological crisis;

**3.13** Climate justice hardly gets mention in most relevant course content and seems to be regarded as alternative or peripheral, rather than mainstream and critical to the whole agenda;

**3.14** Although learning for sustainability is mentioned in the How Good is our School (HGIOS) assessment framework, and has been in the framework since 2016, there are no negative implications of sanctions if a school does not deliver the entitlements and expectations relating to Vision 2030+. This inadvertently leads teachers and school leaders to deprioritise and devalue the entire agenda;

**3.15** It is unclear to us how fee-paying schools are encouraged, supported and assessed on their teaching on the climate emergency, climate justice and ecological crisis;

**3.16** Vocational courses in Scottish 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.);

**3.17** There has been a 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. The commitments to outdoor education made in the Vision 2030+ action plan are likely to be insufficient to reverse this trend;

**3.18** Scottish educational institutions are typically not acknowledging, or sufficiently acting upon, the youth voice on the climate emergency and ecological crisis. There is great support and 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, at a local or national level;

**3.19** A lack of funding is often cited as a barrier by young Scots 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";

**3.20** Despite recommendation 10 in Vision 2030+<sup>11</sup>, most Scottish schools, colleges and universities do little or nothing to encourage us to contribute to, or lead on,

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<sup>11</sup> **Recommendation 10:** 'Learners should be fully involved in the process of improving the sustainability of their campus as it provides a valuable opportunity for them to develop new skills and awareness of careers. We should recognise that school grounds are valuable community assets and wherever possible ensure that learners and their communities are given access out of school hours.'

sustainability in terms of operational and estate issues. Sustainability is often done for us, rather than with or through us. This remains a missed learning opportunity;

**3.21** Despite recommendation 9 in Vision 2030+<sup>12</sup>, the buildings and estates that we are educated in and on are often environmentally inefficient, wasteful and powered by fossil fuels. These assets are our subliminal curriculum and form part of our learning on sustainability. When we are lucky enough to receive good transformative climate education, the unsustainable buildings around us often undermine the key message and cause apathy or frustration amongst us. This year, in 2020, substantial new educational buildings are being built across Scotland without renewables on them, which is perverse and regressive given the ambition stated in Vision 2030+.

While we appreciate that in the Scottish education system, nothing can be made mandatory in the curriculum, schools could be encouraged to integrate climate and sustainability education across all subjects. This would work in tandem with the various pieces of existing education legislation, creating a clear expectation and duty on education providers, at all levels, to deliver appropriate teaching and learning on the climate emergency, climate justice and ecological crisis.

## 4.0 What are we asking the Scottish Government to do?

### **ASK 1: Mainstream inclusion of climate justice education across the curriculum**

With the abolition of the SQA and the recent Scottish Government national review into school age education, in line with the new vision for education, it is extremely important that climate and biodiversity are distinct strains of education going forward, in all forms of education. We believe this should prepare students to abate and end the climate emergency and ecological crisis and deliver climate justice.

Taking inspiration from the 2021 campaign for TIE LGBT Inclusive Education<sup>13</sup>, we want to implement a mainstream approach to climate justice education in Scotland. The particular delivery of this should be carried out by the Scottish Government and COSLA, with insights and support from young people. The TIE campaign has delivered clear expectations and resources for educators to access and adapt to their teaching. We see the TIE process as a model for mainstreaming climate education and believe implementation of the review as an opportunity to do this.

The National Discussion on Education 2022 consultation<sup>14</sup> results are (at the time of writing) under analysis. We recognise that the results from this will be extremely valuable in understanding the public opinions of recent Scottish education. Once

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<sup>12</sup> **Recommendation 9:** 'Local authorities need to remain vigilant to ensure that improvements to their school estate meet the highest standards of sustainable and environmental design as set out in Building Better Schools and Principle Six of the School Estate Strategy. Care needs to be taken to ensure that ambitions to improve the sustainability of the school estate are kept up front at each stage of the design process to achieve the desired outcome. Buildings and grounds need to support learning for sustainability pedagogy and practice and include the provision of thoughtfully-developed greenspace to support learning and facilitate daily contact with nature and natural play. Partnership working with end users should be supported to ensure they use the buildings and grounds in a sustainable way.'

<sup>13</sup> [LGBTI Inclusive Education Working Group: report to the Scottish Ministers - gov.scot](#)

<sup>14</sup> [National Discussion Scottish Education - Scottish Government - Citizen Space](#)



results are published, they can provide further content for the prioritisation of climate justice education.

Teach the Future Scotland asks that the review should be developed in consultation with all relevant interests, stakeholder and representative groups, especially young people and students. As a student-led campaign, we ask to be part of a youth sub-committee to support the implementation of these results. This committee should also include students from second, third and higher education.

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

Learning about the climate emergency, climate justice and ecological crisis should be a substantive and ingrained part of teaching education courses for all levels of education as part of continued professional development. This includes it being embedded within initial teacher education, which is an objective of the [Government's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan](#). Teacher education should leave teachers confident in their understanding of, and ability to educate students in climate change and sustainability, and enable staff members to identify and support pupils suffering from eco-anxiety. We believe that the future of education must be collaborative to form a robust model for teaching the future.

Teach the Future Scotland recognises that teachers, at all levels of education, are already overworked, so the incorporation of climate and sustainability in teacher education should be painlessly incorporated into educators' work, not simply added to their workload without appropriate support. Training should be fully paid, manageable alongside educators' normal workload and ideally delivered within normal working hours. These actions should not wait for the review in Ask 1 and should be completed immediately.

## **Ask 3: Increased priority for sustainability in school inspections**

The independent body for school inspections should ensure that the Chief Inspector of Education puts significant new emphasis on learning for sustainability in all school assessments immediately and introduce a model of peer-to-peer inspections. This new emphasis should have a significant weighting in the school's overall assessment, and should include all five of the strategic recommendations of Vision 2030+<sup>15</sup>. This would work in tandem with the Muir review, which has proposed a more holistic and site specific inspection process<sup>16</sup>.

This should include questions about climate justice education and sustainability. In current questionnaires prior to school inspections, students, guardians and staff are asked questions such as, "My school teaches me how to lead a healthy lifestyle." We propose that sustainability be included in this questionnaire to provide quantitative data for each school on how students, guardians and staff view its climate education.

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<sup>15</sup> [Vision 2030+ Report: Concluding report of the Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group | Self-evaluation | National Improvement Hub](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education – gov.scot](#)

This can then be used to better understand and support climate education on a case-by-case basis.

We are supportive of the Scottish Government's existing policy against league ranking tables for education, as the correlations between socio-economic status and ranking scores cannot be denied. We seek to support the Scottish Government and the inspectorate in finding more value based measurements for sustainability and beyond.

#### **ASK 4: Educational buildings put at the front of the queue to be retrofitted to net-zero standards**

This is, in part, inspired by the Policy paper, 'Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems in England'<sup>17</sup> which seeks to understand short, medium and longer-term actions for improving educational facilities in line with sustainability targets. Whilst some carbon standards are in place for new builds, the Scottish Government must put existing educational buildings to the front of the queue to be retrofitted to net-zero standards by 2030, and provide adequate funding for this. This would see educational facilities prepared and future-proofed for the expected rise in average global temperatures and associated climate impacts. If our education system is to teach students about sustainability, the buildings they learn within must be sustainable. There should be a prohibition on the installation of new or replacement fossil fuel heating systems and other appliances with immediate effect.

## **Summary**

This paper has presented our asks created and adapted by current and recent students in Scotland, and informed by those working in the Scottish educational sector. We aim for our asks to inform future policy in Scotland, rather than serve as an implementation plan. We need action now, if there is to be a future for education and our planet. Teach the Future Scotland wishes to collaborate with relevant stakeholders, while always prioritising the voice and experience of young people and students.

- ASK 1: Mainstream inclusion of climate justice education across the curriculum.
- ASK 2: Inclusion of the climate emergency and ecological crisis in teacher education and a new professional teaching qualification.
- Ask 3: Increased priority for sustainability in school inspections.
- ASK 4: Educational buildings put at the front of the queue to be retrofitted to net-zero standards.

Thank you for supporting Teach the Future Scotland .

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<sup>17</sup> [Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems - GOV.UK](#)