

Northern Ireland Asks 2024

- 1. By 2028, introduce a climate emergency education qualification by working with Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers, which is approved by the Department of Education and accredited by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), alongside inclusion of climate education in Teacher Professional Learning (TPL).**

As the National Climate Education Action Plan for England¹ states, "All teacher trainers and initial teacher trainees should be able to access training that empowers them to effectively incorporate climate education within their teaching across all levels and subjects". At the moment, this opportunity for upskilling does not exist within education in Northern Ireland, and there is an over-reliance on the initiative of already overworked teachers. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know about, and this is an essential step in the right direction.

What is more, we believe this should be a compulsory, rather than an optional module within both ITE and TPL, given the importance of the climate crisis, particularly in education. This should include the science of the climate and ecological crises, the system changes required to abate them, and training to enable staff to identify and support pupils suffering from eco-anxiety.

- 2. Curriculum review looking specifically at climate change and wider sustainability by 2029.**

We would like to see a curriculum review looking at where climate education can be included within the curriculum. At the moment, effective climate education is limited to Geography, and in Key Stage 3, it relies on the initiative of teachers and schools. At GCSE level, only 48.5% of subjects have any mention of climate change, environmental issues or sustainability. What is critical is that none of the compulsory subjects – Maths, Religious Studies and English Language – fall into this group. With

just over 6000 pupils studying GCSE Geography in Northern Ireland in 2023², out of an average cohort of 22,000, many pupils are not accessing quality climate education.

3. Introduce a National Climate Education Action Plan, by co-creation with academics, civil servants, young people and teachers.

England has a National Climate Education Action Plan, led by the University of Reading, by 'bringing together young people, scientists, teachers and educationalists, policymakers and campaigners at a Climate Education Summit to create this action plan for better climate education in schools and colleges in the UK'.

We believe that Northern Ireland should follow suit, and Climate Education should be prioritised.

4. Retrofitting of all educational buildings by 2033.

The Department of Education of Northern Ireland has outlined quite clearly the budgetary pressures they're facing, which has led to various cuts, including the likes of Happy Healthy Minds³. We understand and recognise the financial strain Northern Ireland has been placed under, but we simultaneously stress the importance of retrofitting, both as a long-term cost-saving measure and a way of reducing schools' impact on the environment. Rising energy costs have placed enormous pressure on schools, who are required to heat inefficient, old buildings at an extraordinary rate. Retrofitting will alleviate this cost, and help the environment. Simple adaptations to education buildings can help meet climate targets, make buildings more resilient to climate change, more energy efficient and healthier places to work and learn. This is why we are asking for it to be prioritised.

5. Once Stormont returns, bring forward a Climate Emergency Education Bill.

Of course, there is nothing that can be done in terms of legislation whilst we do not have a functioning Executive. However, when an Executive returns, it is imperative that a Climate Emergency Education Bill is introduced, along the same terms as the English version⁴. This would involve a number of things, including;

- creating a statutory duty for the Department of Education to review the national curriculum to integrate climate change and sustainability,
- further integration of climate change and sustainability into vocational training,
- giving schools a duty to provide climate education,
- requiring exam boards to integrate climate change and sustainability into qualifications, exams and assessments
- monitoring of these requirements by the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI)

Above all, this document is **rights-based**, and grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK Government.

Article 12: Right to Express their views and to have them considered and taken seriously.

Article 28: Right to Education.

Article 29: Goals of Education.

General Comment 26: [You Have a Right to Climate Education](#)

Teach the Future NI
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1: [NATIONAL CLIMATE EDUCATION ACTION PLAN](#).

2: [CCFA GCSE Geography Summer 2023 Report](#)

3: [End of children's counselling service is a 'cliff edge falling away', says professional body | BelfastTelegraph.co.uk](#)

4: [Climate Education Bill – Parliament \(publications\)](#)

5: [Resources for tackling the climate crisis | National Education Union](#)

6: [An open letter by British and Irish teachers' unions re the importance of climate education](#)

