

# TEACH THE FUTURE

## 1.0 Introducing Teach the Future

Teach the Future is 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 to 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 demand to reform the national curriculum. As education is a devolved matter we have initially tailored our demands 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 makes it impossible for us to progress our demands there at this time. All four nations need to do much more on this agenda, as evidenced by the below research and analysis of the problems, which generally applies 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.

### **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 GSCE, 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 or allowed 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 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;
- 3.15 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?**

### **DEMAND 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 so as not to disillusion student campaigners, many of whom are anxious for immediate change. 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 issue of eco-anxiety in young people), 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 in due course.

## **DEMAND 2: Inclusion of the climate emergency and ecological crisis in English teacher standards**

As is the case in Scotland and Wales, learning about the climate emergency and ecological crisis should be detailed in the Government's teacher standards for England. This will ensure that it is included in teacher training courses. This should not wait for the review in Demand 1 and should be done immediately.

## **DEMAND 3: An English Climate Emergency Education Act**

Regardless of the review's recommendations, it is unlikely that there will be an appetite to change the 2002 Education Act (section 78) in relation to the climate emergency and ecological crisis. An alternative is to create a symbolically important new act, 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 additional targeted funding to deliver this. This could conceptionally be like the US National Defence Education Act 1958, which provided funding and framing for STEM across all forms of formal education as part of the space race. Another example is the Welsh Future Generations Act, which has led to changes in how sustainability is taught in pre-16 education. The targeted funding might be used to:

- A skills development programme for existing teachers on the science of the climate emergency and ecological crisis, and the systems changes required to abate them, and provide teaching resources;
- Upskill other key educational institution staff on the climate emergency and ecological crisis, such as governors, trustees, bursars, estates managers, administrators, catering teams;
- Facilitate university climate academics to deliver relevant education for teachers in local schools and multi-academy trusts;
- Facilitate teacher / lecturer exchanges and learning visits within and between the different forms of education (primary, secondary and tertiary);
- Develop university and secondary school student volunteering on sustainability within and between the different forms of education;
- Provide catalyst funding for related educational innovation on a regional basis, such as regional centres of excellence on climate and ecological crisis education;
- Develop national centres of excellence to promote the reskilling of students through vocational courses FE colleges, in line with the green skills aspects of industrial strategy;
- Fund more targeted initiatives on outdoor education and connection to nature;
- Deliver a national research programme to demonstrate the impact and outcomes of sustainability learning in terms of attainment, resilience and employability;
- Fund an annual climate and ecological crisis education conference, to include key actors including exam boards, regulators, professional course accrediting bodies, teacher associations and unions, student representative bodies, graduate recruitment bodies and employers;



- Convene a national youth-led stakeholder group on sustainability in education, advising relevant Government departments.

#### **DEMAND 4: A national climate emergency youth voice grant fund**

The Netherlands runs a national grant scheme for youth and sustainability charities which funds them to train and support young people to sit on advisory panels on the climate emergency and ecological crisis for 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.

#### **DEMAND 5: A national Youth Climate and Ecological Endowment Fund**

A new endowment should be created to fund youth-led community-level action, enabling students to collectively mass engage their peers, teachers and parents in 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. The funding provided would go directly to young people and students via their schools, colleges and universities (small one-off grants), as well as funding charitable organisations that work with students (large multi-year grants, focused on capacity and movement building, possibly to progress some of the ideas outlined in demand 3). It would fund apolitical action on the climate emergency and ecological crisis through informal curriculum activities as well as extra-curricular initiatives. The endowment would be invested in new renewable energy assets, in keeping with the aims of the scheme. It might be that leading businesses and philanthropists decide to provide seed funding or add to the fund to build it up over time as part of their own response to the climate emergency and ecological crisis. 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.

#### **DEMAND 6: All new state-funded educational buildings should be net-zero from 2020; 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 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 being net-zero by 2050, but the science says we need to go much further and faster, and we think the educational estate should be a 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 2020, 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.

Zamzam Ibrahim, 24, SOS-UK  
Joe Brindle, 17, UKSCN  
[hello@teachthefuture.uk](mailto:hello@teachthefuture.uk)  
30 October 2019

