

Wildlife and Countryside Link
Nature and Wellbeing Strategy Group
24 March 2022

Department for Education's draft Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy

Introduction

[Sustainability & Climate Change A draft strategy for the education and children's services systems](#)

“Education is critical to fighting climate change. We have both the responsibility and privilege of educating and preparing young people for a changing world – ensuring they are equipped with the right knowledge, understanding and skills to meet their biggest challenge head on.”

As Wildlife and Countryside Link, a coalition of 65 environmental organisations in England using our strong joint voice to advocate for nature, climate and people, we share the view that education is critical to fighting climate change, halting and reversing the decline of biodiversity, and increasing opportunities for all children and young people to connect with nature. Education is essential to address the climate and ecological emergency and to (re)connect young people with nature for their health and wellbeing. Nature and people's wellbeing is inseparable.

This response is supported by the following Link members: A Rocha UK, Institute for Fisheries Management, John Muir Trust, Plantlife, People's Trust for Endangered Species, The Wildlife Trusts.

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Link Response – Introduction

Wildlife and Countryside Link welcomes the Department for Education's recognition of the importance of the education sector in tackling the nature and climate emergency and engaging young people in nature and preparing them for the future.

We welcome the draft Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy and the opportunity to comment on the draft Strategy and to engage further with the Department for Education about sustainability and climate change in the education sector.

Systemic and radical change is required for education to contribute to tackling the nature and climate crisis and to reconnect young people with nature and prepare them for the future.

We welcome Department for Education's proposals in this draft Strategy, as outlined under the five action areas, climate education, green skills and careers, the education estate, operations and supply chains, and the National Education Park and Climate Leaders Award. We provide below further comments on the topics of climate education, green skills and careers, and the Education Estate, relating to the National Education Park and the Climate Leaders Award.

We urge the Department for Education go further to deliver whole-sale, systemic change to the education sector, including by:

- Resourcing the Strategy for Sustainability and Climate Change so that the strategy can be delivered by all schools, for all pupils. Leaving these proposals for schools to pick up will make piece-meal, not whole-sale, change.
- Updating the support for and qualification of teachers and the Common Inspection Framework to reflect a 21st century curriculum.
- Collaborating with and secure more cross-Government support and join up to tackle the challenges faced by the education sector.

Comments on Action Areas

1. Climate Education

We welcome the proposals in the draft Strategy for more sustainability and climate change content in science, geography and citizenship. However, climate and sustainability need a place in every subject in the curriculum. We urge DfE to take a holistic view of subject specifications and increase the range of topics that incorporate climate and sustainability.

In addition to the Environmental Science A level introduced in 2017, we believe that the introduction of a Natural History GCSE could provide a meaningful pathway for young people to learn about the world around them and develop the required knowledge and skills to progress into environmental and sustainability careers.

As the draft Strategy acknowledges, teacher training and support will be vital to integrating climate education. We suggest a review of the core standards, or the development of a supplementary set of standards, to influence teaching. Climate and sustainability should form part of teacher training pre-qualification. As well, we advocate for the development of continual professional development (CPD) modules to support teachers to thread climate and sustainability across the curriculum outside of science and geography alone.

Finally, the draft Strategy does not address outdoor learning and support for teachers for outdoor learning. Trainee teachers should be supported to understand and develop expertise in the use of outdoor learning as a framework for teaching across all subjects. Embedding outdoor learning into the curriculum can improve teaching practice, address poor attainment (outdoor learning has been proven to improve attainment) and improve the health and wellbeing of pupils (the UK Government could adapt the Learning for Sustainability entitlement as part of education in Scotland).

2. Green Skills and Careers

A generation of new skills is required to support the transition to a net-zero carbon economy and to recover our natural world.

Every job has the potential to be a green job. While the Strategy places the emphasis on existing green sectors as the focus for skills development, these are not the only areas of the economy that will be impacted by the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss or that will have to grapple with sustainability. The draft Strategy should acknowledge and plan for the need for a workforce with the right skills and expertise to support and build a net-zero carbon economy and restore nature across all sectors of the economy.

All jobs should be sustainable jobs, also from the health and wellbeing angle. The [Marmot Review](#) stated that ‘fair employment and good work for all’ is essential for a healthy standard of living for everyone. Giving young people the skills and outdoor learning education so they can choose to work sustainably in any vocational pathway should be a key driver within the Strategy, with a visible read-across into the Climate Education action area.

3. The Education Estate – and relating to the National Education Nature Park and Climate Leaders Award

The draft Strategy outlines plans for a National Education Nature Park, which has ambitions to engage young people with the natural world, directly involve them in increasing biodiversity in their nursery, school, college, or university, helping reinforce their connection with nature.

We feel there is a missed opportunity to make the nature park a living part of the school day and the curriculum. The greening of school grounds and more outdoor learning is a great opportunity to tackle climate change, enhance nature’s recovery, connect young people with nature, [benefit their health and wellbeing](#) (see more detail in the ‘Evidence’ section below), and give them skills and knowledge in climate education.

However, training, support and resources will be needed for schools and teachers to implement this vision. Teachers will need the skills, resources and practical equipment in order to give them the confidence and capacity to fit additional activities and outdoor learning into an already crowded school day. Schools require practical guidance, usually in person, by experienced practitioners to develop the pathways to outdoor learning, especially where this includes physical improvements to school grounds. A more comprehensive package of support and ongoing training will be required to maximise the impact of the nature park.

Greening of school grounds in order to gradually increase the amount of learning in greener, natural spaces is crucial and provides opportunities for nature’s recovery, net zero and climate adaptation. While the Education Nature Park is an interesting initiative and great to involve pupils, the work needs to be done and resourced by the schools.

Finally, on the Climate Leaders Award, this must be funded to ensure all schools can take part. We suggest that bringing campaigning into this award will boost young people’s confidence and enable them to develop key skills for future employment including leadership, negotiation and influencing skills, critical thinking, and community connections.

Conclusion

The aims of the draft Strategy are ambitious and could make a genuine contribution to tackling the nature and climate crisis and connecting young people with nature and preparing them for the

future. However, the draft Strategy will not achieve its stated aims without resourcing and greater cross-Government collaboration. The actions areas within the strategy are siloed, and could achieve more if they were joined strategically. Finally, it is a missed opportunity not to embed outdoor learning with the Strategy as a core component of teaching and of teaching about climate change and sustainability.

Evidence

- **Nature Nurtures Children** UCL's 2019 report [Nature Nurtures Children](#) looked at 450 primary school children and the effects of Wildlife Trust-led activities on their wellbeing. This is one of the largest studies into the effects of outdoor activities on children's wellbeing and views about nature. Overall, the research revealed that children's wellbeing increased after they had spent time connecting with nature. The children also gained educational benefits as well as wider personal and social benefits:
 - 90% of children felt they learned something new about the natural world
 - 79% felt that their experience could help their school work
 - After their activities 84% of children felt that they were capable of doing new things when they tried
 - 79% of children reported feeling more confident in themselves
 - 81% agreed that they had better relationships with their teachers
 - 79% reported better relationships with their class-mates