



Department  
for Education

# **Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy: our progress so far**

**December 2023**

# Contents

Foreword: Baroness Barran, Minister for the School System and Student Finance	3
Progress Update December 2023: Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy	3
International	4
Climate education and green skills	4
Estates and digital infrastructure	5
Operations and supply chains	6
Supporting the system to inspire, plan and act	6
Next Steps	9

## **Foreword: Baroness Barran, Minister for the School System and Student Finance**

In April 2022, the Department for Education published the Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy for the education and children's services systems. This followed extensive engagement with the sector and young people, and set an ambitious vision that the UK education sector would be a world leader in sustainability and climate change by 2030.

Since publishing the strategy I have been constantly impressed by the incredible progress toward this vision, driven by the leadership of sector bodies and institutions and through the resilience and commitment of passionate individuals.

Over the past year, we have developed formal and informal partnerships to deliver against the strategy and have seen growing interest in sustainability in education. We have evolved our ways of working to ensure we continue to learn from those impacted by our initiatives. We have moved from working groups to an ongoing feedback and challenge mechanism through our User Group and Youth Focal Points. In doing so, we have demonstrated how young people and government can work together in a genuine and meaningful way.

I have recently returned from COP28, where I saw how the profile of education in climate change has continued to increase since we first brought education and environment ministers together at COP26. While we look to the education system in England to achieve our vision, I am also delighted the UK is an integral part of collective action on a global scale.

I am proud of the progress we are reporting in this first annual update and grateful to all those responsible for this shared success. There is of course still a lot to do. We are in the initial phase of an 8-year strategy and I look forward to seeing how work develops. I am particularly excited for 2024, as the National Education Nature Park reaches and inspires more young people and as we begin supporting settings to put in place, or further develop, holistic plans for action on emissions and climate risk evidence.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their positivity in working with us and for their passion and continued energy in ensuring education responds to the climate crisis at the scale and speed that is required.

## **Progress Update December 2023: Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy**

Following publication we have made progress against the action areas we set out in the Strategy: International, climate education and green skills, education estate and digital infrastructure, operations and supply chains.

## International

At COP26 we made a significant first step in raising the profile of education as a tool to help mitigate climate change by convening the first ever international environment and education ministers' summit.

We have since worked with UNESCO to develop the Greening Education Partnership (GEP) to bring a more coordinated approach to activity on climate and education:

- The Partnership, launched at COP27, provides a framework through which we can prepare every learner for a changing world.
- GEP membership now exceeds 80 UN member state countries and one thousand organisations.
- We continue to support the strategic direction of GEP through our role as a co convener and as a member of the advisory board.
- The inclusion of a dedicated education day at COP28 demonstrated continued progress.
- Over 40 countries endorsed the climate and education declaration at COP28, committing to actions to adapt, mitigate and invest in tackling climate change through education.

## Climate education and green skills

We continue to work alongside organisations supporting teachers to make sure that our children and young people not only understand the scientific facts of climate change and have the skills needed for the future, but also that they have hope and determination to tackle the challenges it brings.

- Climate change is now included in science teachers' continuing professional development.
- We have introduced a new occupational standard for all new further education teachers to integrate sustainability in their teaching.
- Oak National Academy is developing new curriculum resources for primary science, aligned with the national curriculum and including an emphasis on nature. A curriculum plan was published earlier in the autumn and further resources will be resourced in batches during this academic year.
- We have been working closely with exam boards and subject experts to develop the draft subject content for the natural history GCSE. We will be talking to key stakeholders about our plans ahead of seeking views in a full public consultation next year.
- We have launched the [National Education Nature Park](#) – offering children and young people the opportunity for hands-on action improving biodiversity, learning data science skills, and finding out about nature's role in climate change.

- We are focused on delivering the pipeline of skills needed for the green transition. The recently launched Agriculture, Land Management and Production T Level can lead to occupations including forestry worker and countryside officer. The new level 3 low carbon heating technician trains people to install technology such as heat pumps and solar heating.
- In September this year, we hosted the first ever [International Green Skills Conference](#) with Times Higher Education at Imperial College London. Bringing together further and higher education, learners, employers, and policymakers – across 33 countries – to collaborate and develop new partnerships to accelerate the provision of green skills and career pathways.

## Estates and digital infrastructure

In November 2021, DfE implemented compulsory standardised net zero building specifications for contractors delivering centrally funded projects. This means that all DfE delivered buildings (new blocks, schools and colleges) are now built to be energy efficient, net zero ready and more resilient to climate change. Condition and sustainability go hand in hand - this commitment to net zero applies to all DfE rebuilding work.

- DfE's first net zero school, Treetops in Grays, Essex, opened in August 2022.
- We continue to work with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) to help education settings access the £1.4bn Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to help cut costs and emissions.
- In 2022 and 2023 education settings have secured approx. £342m of the available funding from the £1.4bn Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, managed by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) which supports the aim of reducing emissions from public sector buildings by 75% by 2037. Phase 3c opened to applications in autumn 2023.
- In December 2022, the Department published [guidance on reducing energy for schools](#) alongside additional funding of £447 million aimed at supporting schools with energy reduction measures.
- Over the next year we will be providing schools with more guidance on sustainable ICT.

The Strategy set out an 'innovate, test and invest' approach to learn what works, delivers the greatest impact and represents the best value for money in meeting the challenge of retrofitting the education estate. Numerous pilots and pathfinders are in progress including:

- The UK's first biophilic primary school, St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy in Derby opened in December 2023. The school has been designed using sustainable and resilient materials and has been designed to connect the inside with nature, promoting better physical and mental health.
- Gen Zero buildings designed using low to no carbon construction methods are in construction at Ashington College, Northumberland; Forge Wood, West Sussex;

Woodside Primary School, Hertfordshire; and, Wellfield Methodist and Anglican School, Lancashire.

- A Resilient Schools Project, testing the optimum combination of retrofit options to improve climate resilience at Keelham, Thorton, Holybrook and Byron Primary Schools in Yorkshire.

We have also been exploring alternative approaches to funding and delivery:

- A [Net Zero Accelerator feasibility study](#) is underway with LocatEd, exploring the potential for rapid rollout of energy efficiency and generation initiatives which will enable targeting of funding, including possible loan and delivery models.

## Operations and supply chains

We have been working across government to share and drive progress on issues relating to operations and supply chains, including circulating to schools a [food waste prevention pack](#) created by the Waste and Resources Action Programme and through our commercial support and outreach we have been promoting sustainable procurement.

- We are currently reviewing commercial commitments within the strategy to see where we can make the most impact.
- Through our Sustainability Leadership and Climate Action Plan programme we will be providing support to all education settings to embed sustainability in their operations and consider their Scope 3 emissions.
- In the strategy we also committed to working across government to support active travel to school with a view to improving physical and mental wellbeing, reduce traffic and improve air quality. In September 23, Active Travel England announced £60 million investment to ensure more children have access to school and cycle training programmes to help make it easier for parents to choose greener travel options.

## Supporting the system to inspire, plan and act

The strategy set out a number of new initiatives designed to inspire children, young people and their settings, and to help education leaders plan and take action.

### Inspire

- The National Education Nature Park, delivered by the Natural History Museum and partners launched in October with a Hidden Nature Challenge, an activity designed to give a taste of the Park concept. In just 48 hours, over 2000 discoveries of hidden nature were identified on nursery, school, and college sites across England.
- A digital hub with curriculum aligned teaching resources, digital mapping tools and community science tool kits is now live. Young people from across England are developing their knowledge of, and connection with nature, through projects to

explore, map and enhance the biodiversity of their surroundings. A series of webinars is being delivered to help settings get started.

- £15m grant funding has been made available to support SEND and participation in disadvantaged schools in areas of nature depletion. We will use evidence to develop the grant programme over time to ensure it supports settings overcome barriers to accessing nature.
- Support officers, employed by the Royal Horticultural Society, are also providing settings with hands on support to help kick start projects.
- Find out more at: [National Education Nature Park and Climate Action Awards \(educationnaturepark.org.uk\)](https://educationnaturepark.org.uk)

## Plan

We committed to providing support to education settings to put in place **sustainability leadership and climate action plans** – to embed sustainability in all they do, from the curriculum and careers to adaptation and decarbonisation:

- We worked with the sector and stakeholders to understand where support is needed.
- We have taken time to design support that will help all settings, regardless of where they are on their journey, to make their first steps, or, to take their ambitions to the next level.
- In May 2023, we published Gov.uk guidance with more information about the policy and planned support. [Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sustainability-leadership-and-climate-action-plans-in-education)

A new support service will roll out in 2024 and will include:

- A digital support hub whose delivery will be led by TPXimpact and supported by United Learning and Blue Marble, to help all settings perform a simple self-assessment and navigate to the help they need. The hub will be developed to share emissions and risk data to enable settings to target their action where it is most needed.
- The Climate Ambassador programme will coordinate local action and provide on the ground support for settings. The project will be led at a national level by the University of Reading and The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education (EAUC) and work closely with STEM Learning, Change Agents, Hopscotch Consulting and Let's Go Zero. Nine regional hubs will be established for Climate Ambassadors in England. In addition to the University of Reading covering the South East of England, the regional hubs will be:
  - Manchester Metropolitan University (North West)
  - University of Newcastle (North East)
  - University of Leeds (Yorkshire & the Humber)
  - Keele University (West Midlands)
  - Universities for Nottingham (East Midlands)

- University of East Anglia (East Anglia)
- Met Office (South West)
- University College London (London)

## Act

Early next year we will be publishing an evaluation framework which will set out a robust approach to monitoring and evaluation:

- We will work closely with our partners across and beyond government to establish a strong evidence base in sustainability in the education sector.
- This evidence will build our understanding of what works and where we need to go further and incorporating this within current delivery and future strategy development.

We also helping settings use evidence to inform action:

- We have successfully piloted the deployment of air quality sensors in schools in order to better understand the role of data in supporting effective management of healthy learning environments.
- A new [Standardised Carbon Emissions Framework for HE and FE](#) was published in January 2023, to help further and higher education institutions understand their energy and carbon impact, how they can monitor and report data and begin to plan actions to adapt and mitigate.
- A carbon emissions framework for schools and early years settings is now in consultation with Unions and stakeholders.
- Condition data provided to the UCL Modelling Platform for Schools simulates what impact interventions such as installing heat pumps could make on energy consumption and emissions. We are using data from this platform to establish benchmarks in the carbon emissions framework and inform our climate risk assessment of the education estate.
- A framework for the assessment of the risks of flood, water scarcity and overheating to education services will be published in early 2024 and setting level data will be available by the end of 2024.

This **risk and emissions intelligence**, along with biodiversity data captured by the National Education Nature Park, will allow DfE and individual settings to take an evidence-based approach to action.



## Next Steps

We will continue to drive action against the commitments set out in the strategy and through the Global Education Partnership. We will also review where we can take action against recommendations from our User Group and Youth Focal Points. This will include:

The publication of:

- An evaluation framework setting out a robust approach to developing evidence to support decision making.
- A framework for the assessment of the risks of flood, water scarcity and overheating to education services.

Ongoing engagement:

- A review our User Group terms of reference and membership in view of new contractual relationships for the delivery of the support for sustainability leadership and climate action plans and to ensure strong representation of users from all phases of education.
- We will continue to work in collaboration with SOS-UK through our Youth Focal Points to ensure our work responds to the needs of young people. We will amplify their work to engage young people with the strategy and our work on climate risk.

Delivery of key initiatives including:

- National Education Nature Park continued roll out of activities, support and grant funding.
- Support for settings to put in place sustainability leadership and evidence-based climate action plans.



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