



1 November 2022

Dear Secretary of State for Education,

The Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy is largely welcomed by the UK Schools Sustainability Network. We commend the vision that the UK should be a leader in sustainability and climate change education by 2030. Just the existence of the Strategy has already helped students and staff make the case for more emphasis on sustainability & climate change in education settings. Thank you very much for involving UKSSN students and staff through various panels to develop the Strategy since its launch a year ago when UKSSN students spoke on a COP26 panel event with then Secretary of State Nadhim Zahawi. We appreciate that our views have been welcomed and much of our feedback taken on board. Please refer to [UKSSN's previous response](#) to the Strategy for more detailed feedback.

Following on from publication of the Strategy in April 2022 at the Natural History Museum (attended by some of us), we would like to enquire about progress and any planned steps for delivery. We hope to be informed soon of who has won the contract for the National Education Nature Park and Climate Leaders Award, which the Strategy stated were 'to be launched in autumn 2022'.

We would like to praise all the positive aspects to the Strategy. First of all, the 2025 target for all education settings to have a **climate action plan**. Furthermore, **sustainability lead** as a designated role will reduce reliance on the voluntary work of overstretched individuals and the promised **carbon literacy training** will empower those leads to drive impactful change. We also applaud the **joined-up approach** to leadership.

However, the UKSSN have some concerns, on which we are seeking more clarity. Firstly, regarding the **curriculum**. In the words of a UKSSN student, *"(Education is) one of the most important aspects in influencing our future."* In light of this, we believe that sustainability should be prioritised, embedded through all subjects, and be a compulsory part of the exam syllabus. As a Year 11 student noted, *"teachers do not have time to cover content that isn't mandatory"*. Secondly, regarding **inclusivity**. As a UKSSN student expressed it: *"If it is voluntary, it may not be fully representative and inclusive"*. Although the Strategy recognises the need for inclusivity, there is no detail on what steps will be taken to achieve this aim. Without sufficient funding and support, poorly-resourced education settings, particularly those in urban or deprived areas, will not be able to deliver the Strategy. Most important of all is **funding and accountability**. A student described the Strategy as *"a worryingly hands-off approach"*. For maximum impact, all education settings need support in accessing funding for sustainability leads, retrofitting buildings etc. The lack of clarity on how net zero will be measured risks greenwashing. Finally, it requires a mechanism for independent assessment to ensure accountability and prevent inequality between settings.

In the words of a UKSSN member of the Strategy Youth Panel, it is a *"great first step in the right direction."* We urge the DfE to continue engaging with sustainability experts, educators and young people to develop the strategy and implement it as effectively, as widely and as soon as possible. We would also encourage an open line of communication with the public to provide regular updates on delivery of the Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Student and staff members of the UK Schools Sustainability Network