

The UK Schools Sustainability Network

<https://linktr.ee/UKSchoolsSustainability>

getintouch@ukssn.org.uk



hosted by

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

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Your Majesty,

This letter represents the views of members of the UK Schools Sustainability Network (UKSSN), who are just as passionate about the environment as you are. For half a century, you have been such a pivotal figure when it comes to raising awareness of climate change, with a history of determinedly advocating and campaigning for the planet, and trying to protect the natural world. You paved the way to where we are now, so firstly, we wanted to say thank you for standing up and fighting for what is right.

In an ideal world for you, Britain would be leading the way in terms of sustainability and setting the right example. But within that, in our ideal world, we want you to continue leading the way, and create a legacy where you inspired and motivated humanity to act globally.

In all of the speeches you have made, the essays and books you have written, and the interviews you have given, you educated and encouraged millions of people. You convinced us that climate change was real, and inspired us to give up meat for more than 2 days a week. Please do not stop teaching people in this way - we believe that raising awareness of issues is vitally important, because as you once said, it is a combined responsibility of all of us to preserve the planet, which requires each person to have the knowledge to do so.

You gave your first speech about conservation when you were only twenty-one, and you've spoken before about empathising with our generation's fears for the future. Hopefully, this means you can understand where our motivations stem from, and have the same goals as us even if you can't give up as much of your time for the cause.

So please, keep doing what you have always done – continue rewilding all of your land, planting hedgerows, promoting more organic agriculture, and supporting your charities. These small gestures set an example of how to live, and what is the right thing to do if we are uncertain. You might not be able to engage in direct campaigns, but you can still influence people's actions! You have such a strong influence in the countries of the Commonwealth, and they are so engaged in environmental issues that you can promote more sustainability. You could encourage people to buy products that are better for the planet by only giving the Royal Warrant to companies that are completely sustainable and are part of the circular economy, because they will trust your recommendation as they hold you in such high regard.

Even as you take up your new responsibilities, and Prince William continues the work which you cared so much about, we believe you can still encourage people to nurture and have respect for Planet Earth; caring about people and the environment is not political, nor is it wrong. Thank you sincerely for everything you have done.

Yours faithfully,

Students and staff members of the UK Schools Sustainability Network

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Dear COP27 delegate or observer,

We're writing to you as representatives of the **UK Schools Sustainability Network** – a network of students, alumni, educators and school staff from across the UK – to pass on our general and UK-specific asks for COP27 in the hope that you can voice them for us.

What we would like to see from COP27:

- Leaders build off the electric atmosphere that **UKSSN members witnessed last year at COP26 in the blue zone** on Youth Empowerment Day when global education ministers and environmental ministers held their first ever joint conference. We demand that they agree to ambitious green education strategies that include meaningful climate and environmental education in the compulsory curriculum as well as all the support schools need in terms of funding, legislation and capacity to understand, mitigate, and adapt to climate change.
- Any agreements, actions or deals move us closer not only to climate action but also climate *justice* with human rights violations challenged, and loss and damage finance factored in.
- Youth voice not used as a propaganda stunt but genuinely included and given weight so that youth take an active role in the conference and any subsequent environmental action.
- Greater public mass education on the COP27 process and outcomes – implemented through schools, the media and other channels – to increase awareness and public participation.

What we would like to see from the UK COP27 delegation:

- The UK government does all it can to push for the above asks of COP27.
- The UK government works to increase levels of awareness about COP27, reduce climate and environmental apathy and increase engagement in the process through education and action.
- As the Department for Education did with its Sustainability and Climate Strategy, factor youth voice into policymaking not just as a youth-washing stunt but as a key part of the process.

The news about the conference is a mix of positivity and negativity with the announcement of the Youth Pavilion featuring alongside stories about Egypt's human rights violations and the fact that Britain's current Prime Minister isn't even going to attend. We hope that you have a productive time at COP27 and thank you for listening to our demands. It's impossible to word how much being listened to means for youth, especially when trying to sort through all the good and bad news.

Kind regards,

Student and staff members of the UK Schools Sustainability Network

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1 November 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of young people and education leaders across the UK, we urge you, as Prime Minister, to deliver on your promise to protect the environment. It is your utmost responsibility as the leader of our country to drive the changes that are so urgently needed if we are to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises. The scientific consensus is that this next decade is critical to combat climate change if we are to keep within 1.5°C. The UK government's ambition of net zero by 2050 is applaudable, but words mean nothing if you do not take action by delivering on environmental policies and drastically reducing our emissions in order to protect nature and mitigate climate change. It is essential to engage young people in the process, as we are the ones who will be facing the full impacts of your government's actions in the future, for better or for worse. Whilst we understand that there are 'other pressing commitments', we very much hope that you will attend COP27, as we are sure you understand that the climate crisis must be taken as a priority. COP27 is a crucial opportunity to demonstrate the UK's ambition and action regarding the most important global issue of our time.

Yours sincerely,

Student and staff members of the UK Schools Sustainability Network