

Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies and the climate emergency

The case for climate education

The education sector has a critical role in contributing to our national and international sustainability goals, including tackling the nature and climate crisis. This includes preparing learners for their future careers and developing the skills needed by employers in a changing world, not just in STEM subjects but across all disciplines and professions.

The need for enhancing education for sustainable development (ESD) competencies through the education sector is high and widely recognised:

- The **UK government** is committed to delivering the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) by 2030. UN SDG 4.7 is “*By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.*” In 2021 the [UK Net Zero Strategy](#) was published, with a focus on learning and skills for technical ‘green jobs’ that will support the transition to net zero.
- The **Department for Education (DfE)** has the ambition of [the United Kingdom being the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030](#), seeing excellence in education and skills for a changing world coming about by preparing all young people for a world impacted by climate change through learning and practical experience.
- The **Committee on Climate Change** recommends using [education to support the transition to a net-zero economy and ensuring a ‘just transition’ for workers transitioning from high-carbon to low-carbon or climate resilient jobs](#).
- Numerous briefings from **academia, industry and trade** show existing as well as projected skills gap related to climate, and broader sustainability, action. They also stress the economic benefits of transitioning to a sustainable economy and the need for investment in skills and training to enable that transition. A [policy briefing](#) from the **Aldersgate Group**, a membership organisation of some of the largest businesses in the UK with a collective global turnover of over £550bn as well as leading NGOs, professional institutes and academic institutions, calls for “sustainability and net zero delivery [to be embedded] across the whole education system and in training and lifelong learning.”
- [Longitudinal data](#) shows **learner demand** for ESD is strong – 89% say they agree their place of study should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development; 82% would like to see sustainable development actively incorporated and promoted through all courses; and 67% say sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about.
- The **public** also believe [the curriculum doesn’t sufficiently address sustainability issues](#), and in particular climate change, and would like to see this change.

Despite this, learner exposure to teaching on the most overtly sustainability-focused courses within tertiary education is reported as low. Less than 43% of higher education students say they have

experienced teaching on ‘understanding how human activity is affecting nature’, ‘using resources efficiently to limit the impact on the environment and other people’ or ‘looking at global problems from the perspective of people from around the world’ at any point in their education to date. In further education, the situation is worse, with fewer than 1% of post-16 learners enrolled on qualifications with broad ESD content.

Similarly, educator capability to adapt their curricula is low. In schools, [75% of teachers feel they haven’t received adequate training to educate students about climate change](#). [Similar research in the further education sector](#) shows a very similar landscape: Data for education professionals in the higher education sector doesn’t yet exist.

The role of PSRBs

Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) have considerable influence over curriculum content, and fundamentally shape what is taught in the subjects studied by those who go on to become decision makers, including key subjects such as engineering, law and health.

The influence of PSRBs on curriculum content varies according to institution, subject and course. In some cases, the curriculum is designed first and then institutions seek an appropriate accreditation body. For others, the process is reversed, with PSRB standards/criteria forming the basis for curriculum design. This is particularly the case when graduation with an accredited course is a requirement for employment within particular professions. Curriculum managers also use occupational standards and the QAA subject benchmark statements to guide content

There is a broad spectrum of approaches undertaken by PSRBs to date with regards to integrating sustainability into accreditation frameworks as well as in their broader approaches to embed, drive and promote climate action and sustainability more broadly.

Research undertaken by SOS-UK, on behalf of the Open University in Wales in 2022, mapped the sustainability content of 24 PSRBs’ accreditation frameworks and showed a lack of substantive education for sustainable development (ESD) content and pedagogies across subject areas apart from those with a direct involvement with climate and sustainability (e.g. courses offered by schools of the environment).

Anecdotally, educators cite the lack of sustainability content within accreditation frameworks as one of the barriers they face to integrate ESD meaningfully into their work. PSRBs are recognised as one of the influencers of curriculum from a ‘top down’, centralised basis – changes made to accreditation frameworks can affect changes across the UK and therefore can enable integration of ESD at a greater scale and pace than, for example, individual educators making changes to their curriculum.

Developing solutions

The event, *‘Delivering integrated climate education, skills and professional standards,’* on Monday 26th and Tuesday 27th February 2024 at St George’s House, Windsor Castle, brings together key individuals from leading PSRBs as well as employer representatives, youth voices and education sector bodies to explore what can be done differently and to seek solutions that will be sector-wide.

We have invited the PSRBs representing the subject areas with the highest student footfall¹, those who represent industries critical in tackling the climate emergency, as well as those who have already initiated work in this field.

We will facilitate discussion and encourage collaboration to accelerate better climate education, providing opportunities for the sharing of knowledge, exchange of good practice and building of lasting relationships to progress action following the event.

Most importantly, we seek to collectively agree meaningful next steps. Some funding has been secured for post-event work to ensure tangible outcomes are achieved. We don't want to pre-empt outcomes of discussions but some anticipated outcomes and follow-up from the event include:

- the start of collaborative action by PSRBs that leads to the mainstreaming of solutions-focused, integrated climate education through the professions;
- a report summarising the discussions and outlining the conclusions of the event, in line with the [St George's House Protocol](#);
- hosted sponsor workshops and sector conference sessions to disseminate findings;
- further next steps as identified through the dialogue.

About the team behind the event

Baroness Martha Lane Fox is hosting the event which is being convened by [EAUC](#) and [SOS-UK](#). It will be chaired by Professor Joy Carter, previously Vice Chancellor at the University of Winchester with extensive experience in sustainability education. It's been generously funded by The Open University, The University of Edinburgh and the University of Southampton.

Thank you for being part of this important event and outputs. We look forward to spending the two days with you, and most importantly to learning from you and collaborating with you.

¹ HESA. HE qualifications obtained by CAH level 1 subject, 2021/22. Available from <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/outcomes>