

Education Secretary puts climate change at the heart of education

Young people will be empowered to take action on the environment as part of new measures designed to put climate change at the heart of education.

Announcing a range of measures in a speech at COP26 today, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi will set out his vision for all children to be taught about the importance of conserving and protecting our planet.

Teachers will be supported to deliver world-leading climate change education through a model science curriculum, which will be in place by 2023, to teach children about nature and their impact on the world around them.

Children and young people will also be encouraged to get involved in the natural world by increasing biodiversity in the grounds of their nursery, school or college by taking small steps like installing bird feeders.

They will be able to upload their data onto a new, virtual National Education Nature Park – which will allow them to track their progress against other schools in the country, increase their knowledge of different species and develop skills in biodiversity mapping.

Combined, the grounds of schools, colleges, nurseries and universities in England take up an area over twice the size of Birmingham, so improving their biodiversity could have a significant impact on the environment.

Children and young people will also be able to undertake a new Climate Award in recognition for their work to improve their environment, with a prestigious national awards ceremony held every year.

The Climate Leaders Award will help children and young people develop their skills and knowledge in biodiversity and sustainability, and celebrate and recognise their work in protecting the local environment. For example, young people may choose to undertake a project that delivers change in their local community, such as increasing the biodiversity of a neighbourhood piece of land or helping to deliver experiences for younger children to explore nature and local woodland.

It will be developed in collaboration with children and young people so that we can ensure it supports them in making an impact in their local communities.

Pupils and students will be able to progress through different levels of the award, 'bronze', 'silver' and 'gold', in a similar way to the Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

We want to deliver a better, safer, greener world for future generations of young people and education is one of our key weapons in the fight against climate change. Empowering teachers in every school to deliver world-leading climate change education will not only raise awareness and understanding of the problem, but also equips young people with the skills and knowledge to build a sustainable future.

The COP26 summit has further amplified the UK's commitments to become a world leader in sustainability right across the education system by engaging young people and bringing them on our journey towards net zero and a green future.

And it goes beyond the classroom – our National Education Nature Park and Climate Leaders Awards will let pupils get hands on experience of understanding, nurturing and protecting the biodiversity around them.

Today's measures will also build on government's pledge for every new school delivered under the Department's school rebuilding programme to be cleaner, greener and net-zero in operation.

The Education Secretary will also confirm plans to test innovative new Energy Pods that can replace gas and coal boilers and supply all a school's heating and hot water without any carbon emissions. These are being tested first in some schools and then could be rolled out to other public sector buildings.

'Energy Pods' are a low to zero carbon plug and play technological solution which provide heating and hot water to existing school settings via solar panels and technology to maximise their output.

The innovation will first be tested in some schools and colleges and if successful could be extended across the school estate and into more public sector buildings.

In addition, from December 2021, all Further Education (FE) teachers trained via an apprenticeship will be required to integrate sustainability into their teaching, through modelling sustainable practices and promoting sustainable development principles in relation to their subject specialism.

These measures, brought together in a draft sustainability and climate change strategy, will be built on over the next 6 months in collaboration with young people, educators, sustainability experts and environmentalists before the final publication of the strategy in April 2022.

Today's announcement comes as part of the Department's commitment to keep the education system at the forefront of sustainability and innovation and help meet the government's target of reducing emissions by 78% by 2035 and reaching net zero by 2050.

As well as launching the draft Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy, the Education Secretary will today host a panel session, in partnership with

Italy and UNESCO, at COP26 attended by education ministers from around the world. He will chair the session and let education ministers from around the world talk about what they are doing and make formal pledges to take significant actions.

UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education Stefania Giannini said:

For the future of our planet, we need to learn for our planet. We welcome the United Kingdom's commitment to climate education through its efforts to place sustainability at the heart of their education system.

New UNESCO data found only half of national educational frameworks have a reference to climate change in them so we are partnering with the Department for Education for today's event at COP26 where global education leaders will be able to make pledges that set out how they will tackle climate change through education in their countries.

Italian Minister of Education Patrizio Bianchi said:

These steps from the UK, as well as the many other pledges we have received, recognise the vital role of education in the fight against climate change. In Italy, we have introduced climate and sustainability education as a key part of learning to provide everyone with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to learn for our planet and act for positive change.

If other countries do the same as us, the UK and other G20 nations then we stand a better chance of winning this fight.