



## **Our Shared World (OSW) Consultation On and Response to Department for Education draft strategy on Sustainability and Climate Change**

- As the largest and most diverse coalition of organisations advocating for realisation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7 in England, Our Shared World (OSW) welcomes the DfE's draft strategy as an important step towards re-envisioning education for the 21st century and beyond.
- In order to develop an inclusive understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented in the DfE draft strategy, we have consulted with over 170 OSW members, individuals and organisations with a shared interest in education and SDG 4.7<sup>1</sup>.
- It is clear from our consultation that there are both exciting opportunities and considerable challenges to supporting progress towards the whole system and transformative approach proposed. These are outlined further in this paper and are accompanied by a set of recommendations which we believe will strengthen the UK's national strategy for climate education.

### **Opportunities** - We welcome the following:

1. The strategy's **recognition of the critical role of education** in preparing young people to think and live sustainably, and to build a better and fairer world for future generations. This is supported by **actively encouraging teachers to address climate change** in their teaching and to **empower all young people to be global citizens**.
2. The focus on **science, geography and citizenship as starting points** to explore climate change
3. The intention to provide **high quality training, support and resources for teachers**, especially at early career stages, and an opportunity to validate ongoing professional development via the NPQ.
4. The way the strategy emphasises a **whole system approach** by drawing together climate education with skills and careers, the education estate, and school operations and supply chains.
5. The support for **upskilling for sustainability** and the **imaginative re-conceptualisation of the education estate** as the National Education Park.

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<sup>1</sup> This consultation took place through feedback from OSW members and a series of online events which took place between November 2021 and March 2022 to reflecting on outcomes from COP26, including the DfE draft strategy



**Challenges** - At the same time, we believe some of these opportunities are offset by the following challenges:

1. The narrow focus on science, geography and citizenship, along with ‘knowledge of the facts’ and ‘green skills’ **limits the ambition of a whole system approach, already being implemented in some schools, and the potential to promote the holistic and transformative learning** that UNESCO identifies is needed in the ESD for 2030 framework<sup>2</sup>.
2. The *kind* of high quality training and support for teachers really matters. It needs to ensure that many more teachers have sufficient breadth of knowledge and skills to educate for sustainability (EfS). We therefore believe the **strategy requires a clearer pathway for EfS training and teacher support**.
3. To empower all young people to be global citizens, the strategy needs to move beyond an inherently one-nation approach **to take a more inclusive framing of climate change** and the actions needed to address it, including promotion of climate justice. It needs to ensure **adults and decision makers listen to the concerns of all young people**, not just those from particular racial or socio-economic backgrounds<sup>3</sup>.

**Recommendations** - We have therefore identified the following opportunities to strengthen the whole system approach by:

- a. **Embedding climate education across a wider range of curriculum subjects**, allowing young people to connect areas of knowledge and skills in keeping with their lived experiences and to **develop the kind of interdisciplinary and systems thinking needed to address sustainability problems**. More emphasis on interdisciplinarity would support the approach of international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and SDG4.7.
- b. **Promoting holistic learning beyond ‘knowledge of the facts’**, to include skills and dispositions necessary for all careers beyond the ‘green jobs’ identified, so that *all* young people can live sustainably and act as global citizens. These include (but are not limited to) skills to critically weigh information from many sources and form independent opinions, think creatively, work collaboratively and apply ideas in practice and action. These skills and the motivations underpinning them require **attention to processes and ways of learning** as much as knowledge content. They can also empower young people where an over-emphasis on *knowing about* climate change may reinforce ‘eco-anxiety’ and passivity, rather than action.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370215.locale=en>

<sup>3</sup> Young people are more likely than adults to recognise the impact of climate change on other people around the world (Jones, 2021, in Anderson, A, 2021, submission to House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee call for evidence on ‘Mobilising Action on Climate Change and Environment: Behaviour Change’)

- c. **Developing a clearer pathway of training, support and guidance for teachers and schools.** This could begin by encouraging all schools to develop a coherent vision for their curriculum which utilises all subjects and whole school frameworks **to investigate global challenges like climate change as practical and ethical problems.** Many schools already use frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and UNICEF's Rights Respecting Award. This should be followed **by incorporating the language of sustainability, rights and justice into inspection criteria** such as the framework for Personal Development and SMSC, and **providing more explicit guidance and support for new and qualified teachers** in the Core Content Framework and Teachers' Standards.
- d. **Ensuring climate teaching and learning is underpinned by an understanding of how different contexts, countries and cultures are impacted by environmental change.** References to a 'better and fairer world' must be supported with detail on how pedagogy and curricula may help to achieve this through exploring interconnections; for example between the climate crisis, poverty and gender. It also needs to be supported by appreciation of cultural diversity and approaches which are truly inclusive of different value systems, experiences and knowledge, so that all young people see themselves reflected in their learning experiences

**OSW can support** development of these opportunities by:

- **Signposting to the wealth of existing resources, training and other support** developed to help teachers to integrate global challenges like climate change across all subjects
- **Identifying opportunities to direct funding to civil society organisations and programmes** which will continue to be instrumental in supporting the DfE's ambition.
- **Advising on enquiry-based, dialogic, participatory and problem-oriented approaches** developed by UK educators over many years. These support teachers to navigate 'partisan political views' without undermining their professional autonomy or young peoples' voices and rights to participate in democratic processes of debate, campaigning and protest. They can also support young people to co-construct responses to climate change with teachers, communities and the DfE.
- **Collaborating with the DfE to build on the theory of change** developed so far, to identify measurable and relevant targets and indicators. This could draw on Research and Evidence gathered through the OSW coalition and our knowledge of best practice, including relevant evaluation techniques and tools for measuring complex changes in knowledge, skills, dispositions and behaviour.

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