# Appendix 1 to NPQ Review Submission: Responses from Active leaders in Schools.

## 1. Kieron Smith- Secondary Headteacher, 30 years in teaching.

I use phrase 'paradigm shift' when I gave my opinion of how education should look to make it fit for the 21st Century let alone the mid 21st Century to my local MP.

Our school has worked very hard on relational practice and the learning behind this, for all, has led to a slowly evolving cultural change creating (I hope) more resilient individuals who are more likely to be hard-wired to understand their place in society and have a developed skill of empathy. I hope that this is an example of building a sustainable education.

The more I have considered the curriculum, the more I have come around to thinking of a new way of looking at what a "core" subject is. I am an engineer by education, but honestly speaking, for me, geography is the one and only "core" as it covers the human condition and factors affecting this. However, my 'old school' thinking here is still pigeon holed by the constraints of the notion of "subject" which itself is outdated.

A sustainable education is one which is long lasting, impactful and which has a value for society and therefore is encouraged to reproduce. I believe it should also be agile and react to the changing society. This is where the role of leaders come in.

Be it building sustainable workforces through creating flexible working arrangements for staff or providing ongoing training for them to be able to respond to need, this requires planning and willing from leaders. When it comes to designing the curriculum, there is a real frustration from me as a leader than we have such restraints due to the national curriculum. We are bound by school years groups, the organisation of the school year, subjects, the curriculum, working time directives and more. This creates issues for leadership if we are to be able to create something that is fit for purpose based upon what is truly, deeply important to us as humans.

In short, there needs to be a radical and comprehensive change in education base upon an entirely new set of priorities. Leaders are trying to mould young people using dies created in Edwardian England. These dies are tired and worn out!

So any effort to include sustainability in the NPQ framework is tremendously important imho. As a footnote, even in many leaders' minds "sustainability" means having an eco group of 30 keen year 7's! In fact environmental sustainability is only one element and 30 year 7's are not going to change the world! It needs to be everywhere in education framed in a way that sells it as ensuring that says we are doing it for the children in school now AND their children!

Even though we have seen great changes in society, after 30 years in this game, I still educate groups of 28 (or more) students of the same age lined up facing me digesting facts within a structured curriculum. The blackboards are now interactive whiteboards but the formula is the same!

## 2. Wendy Litherland - Deputy Head, Sustainability Director, Secondary Science

I am writing to you in my capacity as Assistant Headteacher, Director of Sustainability at St Christopher's CE High School, and a school leader with 18 years of experience in embedding sustainability across our school and Sixth Form. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the current NPQ consultation, particularly on how ESD can be meaningfully integrated into leadership qualifications.

**The Leadership Role of Sustainability**
Leading on sustainability mirrors many aspects of headship—overseeing numerous interlinked components that must operate cohesively. However, sustainability leadership goes beyond mere oversight; it requires an authentic understanding of school culture, the surrounding community, and the potential of sustainability to transform both physical spaces and student aspirations. Effective ESD leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach; it demands the capacity to tailor sustainability initiatives to the unique needs of the school environment.

At St Christopher's, this philosophy has been instrumental in driving change. We have established a bi-weekly Eco Group that empowers students to take ownership of sustainable practices and gives colleagues the reason to have it embedded within the curriculum, not because they are told, but because it makes their teaching more relevant. Additionally, we created a Local Eco Cluster Group to foster collaboration between schools and the community, enhancing collective impact. The Sustainability Learning Conference, which I co developed with a primary headteacher (now retired)and lead, brings together educators and leaders to share best practices and address common barriers—most notably, the lack of coordinated support and cohesive strategic thinking.

**Overcoming Barriers to ESD Implementation**
In my experience, the primary barriers to integrating sustainability within school leadership stem from insufficient support structures, fragmented approaches, and limited understanding of sustainability's transformative impact. Effective ESD leadership requires a community-focused mindset, strong communication skills, and the ability to demonstrate the real-world impact of sustainability initiatives. These leadership qualities must be embedded within NPQ training to prepare school leaders who can champion ESD effectively.

Sustainability is not just an add-on to the curriculum; it is a vehicle for delivering core educational outcomes through project-based learning. By aligning sustainability projects with curriculum goals, students learn from the very buildings they inhabit and the land on which their school sits—deepening their connection to the community and enhancing their sense of purpose and place.

I believe the NPQ framework presents an opportunity to embed ESD principles not merely as theory but as lived, practical leadership. I would welcome the chance to discuss how this might be achieved, drawing upon the successful practices we have established at St Christopher's.

## 3. Tina  Farr - Head, Primary School

Tina is the Headteacher at St Ebbe's Primary, Oxford. Her approach is a 'Triple WellBeing' one where environmental sustainability is interconnected with wellbeing and community. Below are her thoughts:

- “A school should feel like a place where people thrive as humans. Not just as students or teachers"

- "We trust our teachers, our children and our families. And when you build a school on trust, everyone thrives.

- "The most courageous leadership decision we can make today is reconsidering what constitutes effective education. This isn't about abandoning standards or accountability—it's about embracing the most developmentally appropriate and effective pathway to meaningful learning and healthy child development.

- I challenge my fellow school leaders: Let's examine our environments, timetables, and pedagogical approaches. Where have we eliminated play? What would it look like to reintegrate purposeful play across age groups? How might we measure the holistic benefits beyond traditional metrics?

- Our children deserve nothing less than educational environments aligned with how they naturally learn best. The evidence is staring us in the face—will we have the courage to act on it?"

- "When we create cultures of belonging, everyone wins. Teachers stay. Students engage. Learning deepens."

- "While we obsess over test scores, what else matters: nurturing whole human beings during their most critical developmental years.

- As educators and parents, we’re not just teaching knowledge—we’re modelling ways of BEING that shape children’s futures: Being kind. Being curious. Being resilient. Being compassionate. Being present.

- These aren’t “soft skills” to squeeze in after “real learning” or add-ons to an already packed timetable. They’re the foundation of human flourishing—the ability to live with purpose, connection, and fulfillment.

- Every time we sacrifice these essential human qualities at the altar of standardised performance, we miss education’s true purpose."

## 4. Laura Arstall - CTL Citizenship, Teacher of RE & Yearleader, Secondary Grammar School

1. Have you tried to embed sustainability and climate change into your setting?

We have been building sustainability into our setting for a few years now in a few different ways. Curriculum wise it has been relatively straightforward in that key CTLs have driven this in their own departments to a greater or lesser extent and understand the links and share these values. A whole school approach has been driven initially through an audit, and then more recently through a student survey of attitudes.

2.What barriers did you face?

As a whole school, it has been harder to navigate with the barriers being a lack of understanding of the benefits of aspects of sustainability and the lack of willingness to engage from some members of the management and site staff. Other barriers are time in the school day/ curriculum.

3. What worked?

What has worked is student led work and feedback to Leadership; offering sustainability learning as a way to develop key skills and recognise them. We have been working at embedding sustainability work into the tutor programme as well as in key curriculum areas. There is a cultural shift happening, which includes student leadership roles for the first time in this area. We hope to harness this now in conjunction with student research.

4. What leadership skills do you think helped?

The main skills used have been collaboration and community building with and between colleagues and students; networking outside of the school and connecting the staff with outside agencies/ individuals. Harnessing the energy of staff to lead on different elements and use their expertise has been key, alongside clear communication with trustees and Leadership.

## 5. Huwaidha Nasser, Secondary School, Science Teacher and Climate Change Lead

In terms of practice as Climate Change Education Lead at my school, I have found a research informed approach has worked well in a school setting where academics are valued. I have found that trying to integrate qualities of a meaningful climate change education, as proposed by Glackin and Greer (2021) with the whole school 4 C approach as outlined by SEEd is starting to take shape. Trying to ensure a democratic approach by working with SLT, staff and students in mapping out the qualities within each C has instigated a culture change. Assistance and direction from a newly appointed sustainability governor has also helped develop this.

In terms of barriers, once someone is appointed as a sustainability lead, the onus falls on a single person and it takes a great deal of energy to try to take people along with you. Trying to balance this with a full timetable has been a huge challenge. Whilst SLT are eager to support where they can, they often lack the skills and knowledge of how to implement a whole school approach effectively. So the main barriers in my experience have been time and resources.

I would certainly recommend a competency based approach to CCE that is expansive rather than prescriptive.

## 6. James Hayes – Science Teacher, Secondary School, Leading on Young Changemaker Programme and Eco Group

Although I am not engaged in formal research on the role of leadership for sustainability in education or carry a formal leadership role within my school, I have been active in engaging with other schools and organisations both locally and nationally to build links and partnerships to collaborate on sustainability. I have also been active in introducing sustainable practices within our school to include school premises, behaviour, energy, biodiversity, procurement, student and community engagement and food. Some projects have had more success than others, but all have benefitted or stalled for many of the same reasons.

Firstly, the role of school leaders as enablers have proven to be critical to success. the introduction of sustainability leadership as part of NPQ's is therefore highly welcomed. I would add to this however that as NPQ's are optional I do not see this as a panacea to sustainability leadership and would offer that this should be a *requirement* for at least one member of SLT within an establishment.

Sustainability is a very broad umbrella and the complexities involved in any project will almost certainly be beyond the skill set of any single person. Skills and knowledge will almost certainly exist elsewhere however, so for this reason NPQ's would benefit from training in engaging with external organisations both locally and nationally. Although national organisations have their advantages, there are regularly local experts to hand.

Anything beyond a whole school approach is a bolt on. That is not to say that benefits cannot be made through this method but it will not be transformative. Whole school approaches are more

sustainable in the long run as there is an paradigm shift beyond the perceived "project" and everyone attending the establishment is involved.

The importance of monitoring and evaluating new practices and changes within an establishment should be considered within NPQ's. If educational practices are making changes, they should be able to understand the impacts of those changes. It is important to acknowledge success, to more readily supply data nationally and to review the impacts of the changes to improve. Sustainability is not an end goal but rather an insightful journey. Due to the complex nature of sustainability, a perceived sustainable initiative may have unforeseen consequences. Educational establishments should not necessarily have to perform these reviews themselves but NPQ holders should be aware of the importance.

Staff are normally very busy so a focus on engaging and managing an initial team of staff within an establishment to include site managers, financial managers, SLT, governors, teaching and non-teaching staff will be important in sharing responsibility and managing changes.

There are many competing time constraints within schools. these can be curricular or other whole school initiatives competing for prominence. For sustainability to be embedded within education establishments it is *crucial* that time is allotted accordingly. This should be directed at students and staff alike. Students will not adapt sustainable practices without time given to embed them and staff/organisations will be unwilling/unable to deliver changes if they are not given time to work on them.

Sustainability should be part of the fabric of every subject, department, discipline, office, organisation and choice made within education. It is not an isolated idea that is only taught in geography or science. Engagement with sustainability offers leadership opportunities for students and staff. Cross curricular learning is embedded in every subject. Improved wellbeing. increased community engagement and integration.  An obvious reduction in environmental degradation.  Increased participation in global citizenship and increased opportunities for equality and understanding other people's perspectives.

*NPQ's should have a clear focus on this aspect of benefit and whole school implementation*. NPQ holders will then be armed with the reason for designating time and the transformative potential of engaging in a whole school approach. They will also have a view of the national and local support networks available to them.

## 7. Simon Lightman - as Head of Philosophy and Politics, Secondary School

**Subject: Reimagining Leadership: Embedding Transformative Sustainability in NPQ Frameworks**

I am writing in my capacity as Head of Philosophy and Politics at King Edward's Witley and as a postgraduate researcher on the MA in Global Learning at UCL, where my current dissertation explores how school leaders conceptualise and implement whole-school approaches to sustainability education. While my fieldwork is still to be conducted, the project builds on ongoing work within my school to develop the

*Bridewell Diploma*—a framework that seeks to embed sustainability, global citizenship, and student agency across curriculum, culture, and leadership structures.

This initiative has brought into sharp focus the challenge and promise of educational leadership in an age defined by uncertainty. The question is no longer whether schools should engage with sustainability and climate change, but how they can do so in ways that are not superficial or tokenistic. What is needed is a deeper reconceptualisation of leadership itself.

**From Competence to Consciousness**

Current leadership frameworks tend to position sustainability as a domain of technical knowledge or project management. However, sustainability leadership, as I encounter it through both research and practice, involves something more profound. Following Sterling (2001), it calls for a paradigm shift in how we understand the purpose of education and the structures that support it. Leaders are increasingly required to hold complexity, navigate contested knowledge, and cultivate ethical clarity in a fragmented world.

This overlaps significantly with the leadership of controversial issues. Both demand courage, reflexivity, and the capacity to work within plural and sometimes antagonistic communities. In my work on school-wide policies for teaching controversial topics, I have seen how sustainability education often *is* the controversy—linked as it is to questions of equity, identity, responsibility, and futures. For leadership training to be adequate to this moment, it must equip school leaders to respond to that reality.

**Key Capacities and Barriers**

Through the design and early-stage implementation of the Bridewell Diploma, a number of critical capacities have emerged that I believe NPQs should reflect:

- The ability to frame sustainability as a cross-cutting lens, not a bolt-on agenda;
- Skills in ethical deliberation and dialogic leadership;
- Systems thinking that links pedagogy, governance, student development, and community;
- Commitment to fostering long-view thinking in an era of short-term performance metrics.

The key barriers I have encountered echo those already raised in your consultation:

- Institutional inertia and competing accountability demands;
- A tendency to isolate sustainability within discrete projects rather than whole-school development;
- Lack of clarity around what sustainability leadership actually entails.

**Recommendation**

I strongly support the inclusion of frameworks like *The Rounder Sense of Purpose* or *GreenComp* in future NPQs. However, these need to be embedded not simply as competency checklists, but as part of a deeper conversation about the epistemological and ethical foundations of educational leadership today. This includes recognising the relevance of pedagogies that foster critical reflection, collective agency, and civic resilience.

I would be glad to share more of my findings as they emerge, and to contribute to future dialogue on how NPQs can rise to the challenge of preparing leaders for a climate-changed, plural, and politically charged world. Leadership in this context is not only a matter of knowledge and skill, but of responsibility, imagination, and care.

## 8 . Clive Murgatroyd, MBE – Non School but interesting!

Clive wrote:
I left the Royal Navy in 2008. My last appointment was in the Ministry of Defence, where I was responsible for planning and delivering future maritime capabilities. I was subsequently recruited by Cranfield University to teach at the Defence Academy, in Shrivenham, expressly because of my interest in sustainability and climate change. The Centre for Defence Acquisition at Shrivenham wanted to include these topics in the various courses that they were running and developing, from Master's level to short training courses.

Conclusions:

1. Changing priorities in government, resulting in loss of focus at the highest levels, partly caused by the loss of senior advocates, and loss/dilution of expertise at middle management and lower levels. Changes to the way that defence did its business meant that course content had to be revised significantly, and it was difficult to retain appropriate sustainability and climate change content when so much new material had to be incorporated. Increasingly busy students needed to be persuaded of the wisdom of being taught about sustainability and climate change, when there was so much else to learn.

2. Having supportive management helped tremendously initially, as did clear direction from central government about the importance of the subjects. Later, understanding the 'system' better, and having become more of an expert myself, it became easier to persuade (busy) course sponsors about the need to retain the subjects in the courses. The return of senior advocates, and the publication of a new strategy, also helped to revitalise the subjects and enhance their credibility as course content. The existence and importance of senior advocates for sustainability and climate change should not be underestimated.

3. Having senior advocates who are able to work together in different parts of an organisation can help tremendously with the initial incorporation and then retention of course material. In their absence, perseverance and knowledge of the 'system' (supported by subject matter expertise) can help to persuade course sponsors of the need for appropriate content. Being patient with students is also necessary – some may

need additional persuasion about the necessity of the inclusion of particular course material, and an understanding of how sustainability and climate change apply in their particular field/job will always be very helpful. In my particular circumstances, it helped tremendously to have had jobs similar to my students, because I could contextualise sustainability and climate change for them more easily. This is of course less relevant in schools, but the ability to contextualise the subjects for students who may be interested in particular careers will be important.

Clive Murgatroyd MBE
Commander Royal Navy (Retired)