

Guidance

Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education

The Department for Education's (DfE) sustainability leadership and climate action plans initiative.

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([/government/organisations/department-for-education](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education))

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Applies to England

Contents

- Overview
- Why having a sustainability leadership and a climate action plan is important
- Developing and storing your climate action plans
- Identifying your sustainability leadership structure
- A whole-setting approach
- Resources

Overview

The [sustainability and climate change strategy for education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and->

childrens-services-systems) states: “By 2025, all education settings will have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan”.

This includes non-domestic early years settings, schools, multi-academy trusts, colleges, and universities. To ensure that the momentum and benefits already seen continue beyond 2025, DfE Estate Management Standards (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-estate-management-standards>) now include the requirement for a sustainability lead and climate action plan.

Wherever you are on your sustainability journey, this non-statutory guidance and the support available can help you get started or take the next step.

Support is available to nurseries, schools and colleges and is provided by DfE through:

- Sustainability Support for Education (<http://sustainabilitysupportforeducation.org.uk/>): provides resources, services and tools to help you identify appropriate action to develop, or build on, your climate action plan
- Climate Ambassador Programme (<https://climateambassadors.org.uk/>): provides access to on-the-ground volunteer climate ambassadors and regional networks to support the development and delivery of impactful climate action plans, working in partnership with Let's Go Zero Climate Action Advisors (<https://letsgozero.org/>)
- The National Education Nature Park (<https://www.educationnaturepark.org.uk/>): provides curriculum-linked resources and practical activities to connect children and young people with nature and engage them in improvement of their local environment. Participation in the Nature Park is a great way to add meaningful education, skills and biodiversity action to your plan

There are many organisations providing courses, products, and services to support an education setting's approach to climate change. There are also many examples of excellent practice when it comes to sustainability and climate change in the education sector, and your individual setting or trust may already have a plan in place. Where this is the case, we are not suggesting that you create a new plan but you may still find ways to build on it to take a more impactful or holistic approach.

Why having a sustainability leadership and a climate action plan is important

We have seen that settings and trusts have the greatest success in driving change where there is a holistic action plan that is supported by a

leadership team with the authority, knowledge, and commitment to take it forward.

Ensuring you have clear leadership for sustainability in place, and a climate action plan, will help your setting to:

- increase the confidence and expertise of your leadership team, staff, learners, and students in understanding climate change and how positive change can be achieved
- create a culture that prioritises sustainability
- share effective practice with other education settings and develop a peer-to-peer learning network
- use data to identify and prioritise action
- improve energy and water efficiency
- calculate your carbon emissions and identify ways to reduce them
- reduce operating costs
- increase resilience and start adapting to the impacts of climate change
- enhance biodiversity
- help learners develop skills and knowledge which help them to contribute to sustainability and climate change in their lives and future jobs
- bring together related actions and plans, such as your School Travel Plan, and Waste Management Plan for a cohesive approach

Developing and storing your climate action plans

A climate action plan is a detailed plan to enable your education setting, or trust, to progress or commence sustainability initiatives.

Creating a climate action plan will allow you to take a structured and strategic route toward ensuring your setting or trust is acting toward, and educating about, sustainability. You may choose to have a climate action plan that sits within an individual setting, across a trust, or both.

The Department for Education does not provide a set template for climate action plans. This allows schools, colleges and other education settings the flexibility to develop a tailored plan that reflects their specific context, priorities and needs.

While the format may vary, all climate action plans should include the following 4 key pillars:

- adaptation and resilience: how the setting is preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change

- biodiversity and nature: efforts to protect and enhance nature and wildlife within the setting and its surroundings
- climate education and green skills: how learners are supported to understand climate change, sustainability, and develop relevant skills
- decarbonisation and net zero: actions to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, working towards net zero

There is no expectation for storing a climate action plan in a specific way. However, we know many settings are proud of the action they are taking and publish their climate action plan or strategy on their website. Having your climate action plan visible is helpful in engaging parents, the local community and external stakeholders on the journey towards sustainability and enhances trust and accountability.

Identifying your sustainability leadership structure

Nurseries, schools and colleges are expected to nominate a sustainability lead.

A sustainability lead's role will be shaped by many factors linked to the context of their setting and where they are on their sustainability journey. Sustainability leads often:

- develop and drive the setting's sustainability vision and action plan
- coordinate activity across teaching, estates, leadership and community engagement
- engage staff, learners and other stakeholders to build buy-in and momentum
- track progress against sustainability goals, reporting impact and lessons learned
- stay informed about relevant policies, practices and opportunities
- champion equity and inclusive approaches in sustainability work

Sustainability leadership can be provided by an individual responsible for the development and implementation of a climate action plan. However, best practice shows that when the lead is supported by a wider team, more opportunities are identified, and the impact is greater. By including educational (for example, teaching staff) and operational (for example, estates management and catering) expertise, this team can be particularly impactful. Many settings also benefit from bringing stakeholders such as learners into sustainability leadership roles too.

A whole-setting approach

It is important that the whole education setting, or trust, is engaged so that planning becomes action.

Learners

Involving children, young people and learners is important in climate action planning.

Doing so can:

- inspire their enthusiasm to help drive positive change
- increase their practical knowledge of sustainability and climate change
- give young people a sense of agency where anxiety stems from climate concerns
- create a sense of pride in their education setting
- enable them to share their knowledge and enthusiasm in their local communities
- enable them to engage their parents, carers, and wider community in sustainability and climate change

Senior leadership team (SLT), governors, trustees and executive leaders

As senior decision makers, SLT and governors should support and drive your sustainable activity. They should:

- provide the authority and support to drive and embed culture change
- ensure climate change and sustainability feature on the agenda at key meetings
- be responsible for succession planning, so that commitment to sustainability endures in the setting

Estates management

The [sustainability of your estate \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/sustainability-of-your-estate\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/sustainability-of-your-estate) section of the [Good estate management for schools guidance \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/sustainability-of-your-estate\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/sustainability-of-your-estate) explains the role of estates management in encouraging sustainability and managing energy and water use.

For settings in further and higher education, a sector specific methodology for calculating carbon emissions, based on the greenhouse gas protocol,

has been published by EAUC – the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges. This follows collaboration with participants of the Platinum Jubilee Challenge, the Royal Anniversary Trust, the Association of Colleges, Colleges Scotland and Universities UK.

The standardised carbon emissions framework for further and higher education (<https://www.eauc.org.uk/scef>) aims to:

- give confidence to institutions who want to start monitoring
- ensure transparency and comparability between institutions who report their emissions

Resources

Be inspired by others. The following resources, organised by sector, demonstrate how some education settings have started their journeys. They highlight some of the tools already available. This is just a small selection of examples. Many more settings are also making excellent progress.

All settings

You can:

- register with the National Education Nature Park (<https://www.educationnaturepark.org.uk/>) and follow the five-step cycle

The Nature Park programme can support all four pillars of climate action plans to bring about a multitude of wellbeing, learning and environmental benefits for your learners and your community.

- create an account on Sustainability Support for Education (<https://www.sustainabilitysupportforeducation.org.uk>)

Register and select your setting type and focus areas to receive tailored, quality-assured actions and resources. Filter suggestions by teaching age, priorities, progress, estate type, and more.

Early years settings

- Read Dr Diane Boyd's sustainability matters in early childhood resource (<https://www.ncfe.org.uk/media/p1socs4v/sustainability-matters-in-early-childhood-resource.pdf>), developed and written in partnership with NCFE
- Read the London Early Years Foundation sustainability strategy (<https://leyf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/LEYF-Sustainability-Strategy.pdf>)

Schools

- Read about Shinfield St Mary's CE Junior School's work around sustainability and ecology (<https://www.shinfield-st-marys-junior.co.uk/page/?title=Sustainability+and+Ecology&pid=56>)
- Read about St Vincent's School, a specialist school for sensory impairment and other needs, and their sustainability projects (<https://www.stvin.com/projects>). These include activities such as:
 - Reclaim the Green, Reclaim the Nature
 - RHS Tatton Park 2022
 - Mersey Region S.S.N
 - Citzenships, Comics & Action
- Consult the National Governance Association's greener governance campaign (<https://www.nga.org.uk/News/Campaigns/Greener-Governance.aspx>)

Multi-academy trusts

- Read about United Learning Trust's sustainability journey (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65044e6dfc63f60014957356/United_Learning_s_sustainability_journey.pdf) (PDF, 165 KB, 3 pages)

Further education settings

- Read the climate action roadmap for UK FE colleges (https://www.eauc.org.uk/fe_roadmap) created by the Association of Colleges, EAUC – the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education, GuildHE and Universities UK partnered through the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education (https://www.eauc.org.uk/climate_commission)

Higher education settings

- Read about the University of Reading's sustainability strategy statement (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6464b29d0b72d30013344612/University_of_Reading_s_Sustainability_Strategy_Statement.pdf) (PDF, 94.4 KB, 2 pages)
- Read about Manchester Metropolitan University's sustainability strategies (<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/sustainability/strategy>) and how they incorporate the 4 key pillars of a climate action plan into their sustainability progress (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6902421771b575684c3cf82f/Manchester_Metropolitan_University_leading_the_way_in_sustainability_in_higher_education.pdf) (PDF, 464 KB, 3 pages).

Share your sustainability journey

We are collecting case studies for use in communications and guidance as we further develop our support.

If you would like to share your experience with others, please send a live website link to your sustainability strategy or send a written submission to DfE's Sustainability and Climate Change Unit:
dfesustainability@education.gov.uk

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