

Behavior change is essential to address the climate emergency

October 13 2022, by Alan Williams



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

The U.K. will fail to meet its net zero and environment targets unless there is a significant increase in efforts to bring about behavior change, according to a major new report.

The publication by the House of Lords' Environment and Climate Change Committee—["In our hands: behavior change for climate and environmental goals"](#)—is the result of an inquiry that heard from 146 organizations from across the U.K. and further afield.

Among the contributors was Alison Anderson, professor of sociology at the University of Plymouth and a world-leading expert on [science communication](#) and behavior change measures to address the global climate emergency.

She provided written evidence to the inquiry, in which she highlighted a number of areas she felt needed addressing in order for the U.K. Government's climate and net-zero strategies to have their desired impact.

They focused mostly on [young people](#)'s awareness of [climate change](#), with Professor Anderson saying they needed a broad climate education that is integrated within all subject areas.

At the moment, she said, young people are mostly finding information about climate change and the environment outside of the formal education system, particularly from [social media platforms](#) such as TikTok and Instagram.

She also called for a change in the way young people were referred to when it comes to climate change, with present efforts leaving them feeling that narratives frame them as uninformed about the issues, while at the same time placing responsibility on them for tackling climate change.

Instead, she suggested the narrative of Government projects relating to youth engagement with climate change should be sensitized to the specific barriers young people face.

Following the report's publication, Professor Anderson said, "The report makes clear that behavior change is critical to tackling climate change and meeting net zero targets. The public want to know how they can play their part but the Government need to provide clear leadership and do more to support them. A combination of policy levers and a joined up, systemic approach, is necessary. As part of this, engaging young people, our future leaders, is vital. In the education realm, sustainability needs to be embedded across the curriculum."

In its report, the committee identified that one third of the greenhouse gas emissions reductions up to 2035 require decisions by individuals and households to adopt low carbon technologies and choose low-carbon products and services, as well as reduce carbon-intensive consumption.

It found that while the Government has introduced some policies to help people adopt new technologies, like [electric cars](#), that focus has not been replicated in other areas.

The committee concluded there has been too great a reliance on as yet undeveloped technologies to get the U.K. to net-zero and a reluctance to help people cut carbon-intensive consumption.

Baroness Parminter, chair of the Environment and Climate Change Committee said, "After a summer of record temperatures, fires and hose pipe bans, it has never been more apparent that the twin crises of climate change and nature loss demand an immediate and sustained response. People power is critical to reach our [environmental goals](#), but unless we are encouraged and enabled to change behaviors in how we travel, what we eat and buy and how we heat our homes, we won't meet those targets.

"People want to know how to play their part in tackling [climate](#) change and [environmental damage](#), but the current approach is inadequate in the face of the urgent scale of the environmental challenge."

Provided by University of Plymouth

Citation: Behavior change is essential to address the climate emergency (2022, October 13)
retrieved 29 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2022-10-behavior-essential-climate-emergency.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.