

7 in 10 pupils want an education that helps them tackle the climate crisis, finds UK report

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Secondary school pupils feel the climate change education they receive is too focused on passing exams and doesn't equip them with the skills they need to tackle the climate crisis, according to a new report.

The research showed that 14- to 18-year-olds believe climate change is the most important issue that needs to be addressed if their lives are to be improved in the future.

Despite that, just over a quarter (26%) of pupils surveyed feel strongly that any actions they currently take to combat climate change might make a difference.

Also, more than seven out of 10 pupils (72%) say they would welcome the opportunity for broader lessons about climate change in school, rather than simply learning facts and associated impacts.

A similar number (68%) believe climate change [education](#) should be included across all subjects, in addition to science and geography where most learn about the climate and how it is changing.

The research was carried out as part of a partnership between the University of Plymouth and the British Science Association's Future Forum program. Since 2017, the British Science Association has been running Future Forums to give [young people](#) a chance to voice their opinions and concerns on science and technology topics such as gene editing, AI and their educations.

It centered around an initial survey of 1,000 14- to 18-year-olds with two follow-up workshops, attended by 41 pupils, providing the opportunity for more detailed responses.

Among the other key findings from the survey and workshops were that young people believe the current approach to climate change education contributes to a sense of climate anxiety and does not inspire hope.

Older students (aged 17 and 18) who took part in the survey said while they are acutely aware of activists like Greta Thunberg and groups like

Fridays For Future, it is more from research outside the classroom. As a result, they expressed a desire to be taught in more detail about ways they can affect positive societal change.

In addition to the knowledge needed to pass their GCSEs and A-levels, young people also expressed an interest in learning more about the social, economic and political issues associated with the [climate crisis](#).

Professor Alison Anderson, professor in sociology and a risk communication expert at the University of Plymouth, commissioned the research. She said, "This report provides useful, actionable insights to those of us tasked with equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to take action on the climate crisis. The findings serve as a clear and loud call for agency and empowerment from the young people we surveyed and interviewed. Only by engaging with the next generation can we develop a successful climate education strategy, giving young people the confidence and knowledge to tackle environmental challenges."

The publication comes just weeks after reports that the Department for Education was dropping plans to provide carbon literacy training to all schools, something it had previously proposed as part of its Sustainability and climate change strategy.

Clio Heslop, head of policy, partnerships and impact at the British Science Association, added, "We are aware from other workshops and polling that young people don't feel heard by decision makers and wider society. Finding out about their experiences of climate change in the classroom, and how that's impacting their anxieties and outlook, shows that action must be taken to make it better for them. We hope these findings help the Department for Education in planning ways to support carbon literacy and improve climate change education."

Christina Adane, an activist and British Science Association honorary fellow, said, "As a young person recently out of the education system, the findings of this report are all too familiar. If I hadn't chosen to study Geography at A-Level, I would not have a thorough understanding of one of the biggest issues my generation faces. We need relevant and compulsory [climate](#) change education that empowers our youth with the knowledge and tools to confront the crisis. It must provide a critical analysis of all the stakeholders at play and the socio-economic implications of [climate change](#), whilst ensuring young people are positively impacted to make change on local, national or global levels."

More information: Climate change in secondary schools: young people's views of climate change and sustainability education:
[www.plymouth.ac.uk/news/seven- ... e-the-climate-crisis](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/news/seven-...e-the-climate-crisis)

Provided by University of Plymouth

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