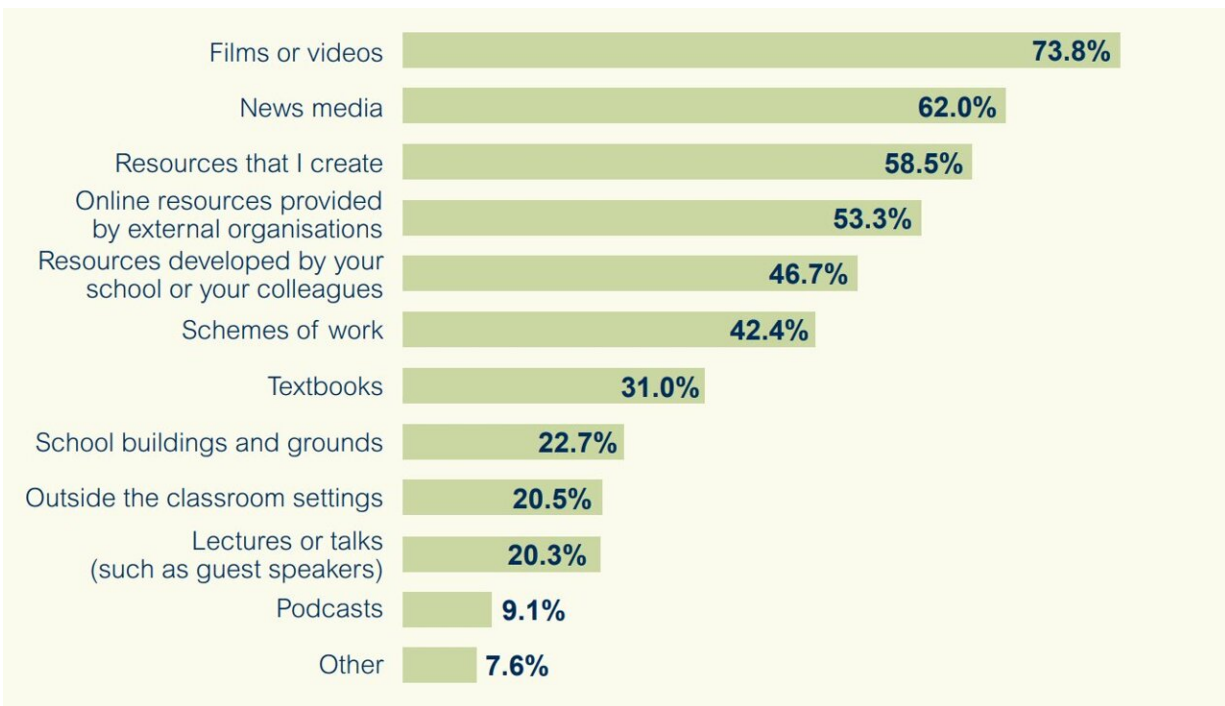


Teaching climate change in more subjects would empower young people to take action

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Use of resources to support teaching related to climate change and sustainability. Credit: *Teaching climate change and sustainability: A survey of teachers in England (2023)*.

The current climate change components on the curriculum tend to focus on the facts and are concentrated in science and geography lessons at secondary school level. The content overlooks the urgency in responding to climate change and does not encourage or equip young people to take

action. Furthermore, a recent national teacher survey by UCL, the largest conducted on the topic to date, found that less than 13% of respondents reported a focus on climate change and sustainability in their Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

The results of the nationwide survey, Teaching [climate](#) change and sustainability: A survey of teachers in England, published by the UCL Centre for Climate Change & Sustainability Education and published on 13th July 2023, found that teachers from all subjects and at all stages need more support to help them embed climate change across the curriculum. Less than half (44.9%) said they had received formal professional development related to climate change and sustainability, while the majority said it was a priority for the topic to feature more strongly on the curriculum, particularly at primary level and in subjects other than geography and science.

Program Director Professor Alison Kitson (UCL Centre for Climate Change & Sustainability Education) said, "Teachers from all subjects and all stages of schooling can play a part in climate change education, but they need support to do this. This support needs to include but also go beyond the science of climate change because this is a holistic issue that affects all aspects of our lives."

"We can only point the way to a more sustainable future for young people by looking at the whole curriculum and providing them with the hope and opportunities for action to help them counteract the anxiety and uncertainty that many are experiencing. Comprehensive professional development for teachers will help them to build confidence and capabilities to embed climate change into their teaching. This will mean that [young people](#) stand a much better chance of being motivated and able to act, now and in the future."

The recent Climate Change Committee report on the UK's progress in

reducing [carbon emissions](#) stated that the UK has lost its status as an international leader on tackling the issue and that the UK runs a high risk of missing its Net Zero targets for 2030 and 2050. The report recommended that urgent steps be taken to empower people to act on climate change. The UCL study authors say that supporting all teachers to more broadly embed the topic across all subjects will make a valuable long-term contribution towards achieving this.

The UCL survey found that teachers from across the curriculum—not just geography and science—would like to include climate change more broadly in their teaching. However, of those who had undertaken some professional development training to support them to do so, the majority (70.5%) did so by teaching themselves.

The survey authors argue that rather than relying on teachers having the time or expertise to teach themselves, they should instead be provided with high-quality professional development which is tailored to their particular subject and stage needs.

The experts say the findings of the survey reveal five key opportunities for improving climate change and sustainability education. These include moving Teacher Professional Development beyond 'self-taught', which many reported to be how they improved their climate change and sustainability teaching; exploring the potential of ITE; extending teaching outside the classroom to encourage and develop skills for taking local action; empowering school leaders to enact change; and building on the National Curriculum.

At the event held on the 13th July, the team also launched free professional development for schoolteachers—the first of its kind in England designed to help them embed environmental issues into their teaching across all subject areas. The training, Teaching for Sustainable Futures, launched with two modules for primary and two for secondary

schools focusing on geography and history, plus a core module for all teachers. The experts plan to launch modules for more subjects in the near future.

Research Fellow Dr. Kate Greer (UCL Centre for Climate Change & Sustainability Education) said, "The [survey results](#) are really encouraging in that large numbers of teachers are stepping up to the challenge of teaching [climate change](#) and [sustainability](#) and that many are self-motivated to work out how to incorporate these topics into their [teaching](#). However, all teachers need formal support—not just geography and science, but history, mathematics, art, and English—so they can support our students to take real action."

A total of 870 teachers and head teachers across England responded to the survey last Autumn, with the demographics being representative of the workforce in state-funded schools. Teachers taking part worked across all subject areas although the majority of respondents taught Science and Geography at both primary and secondary levels.

More information: Report: discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10173208/1/Teaching%20climate%20change%20and%20sustainability_CCCSE%20survey_July%202023.pdf

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