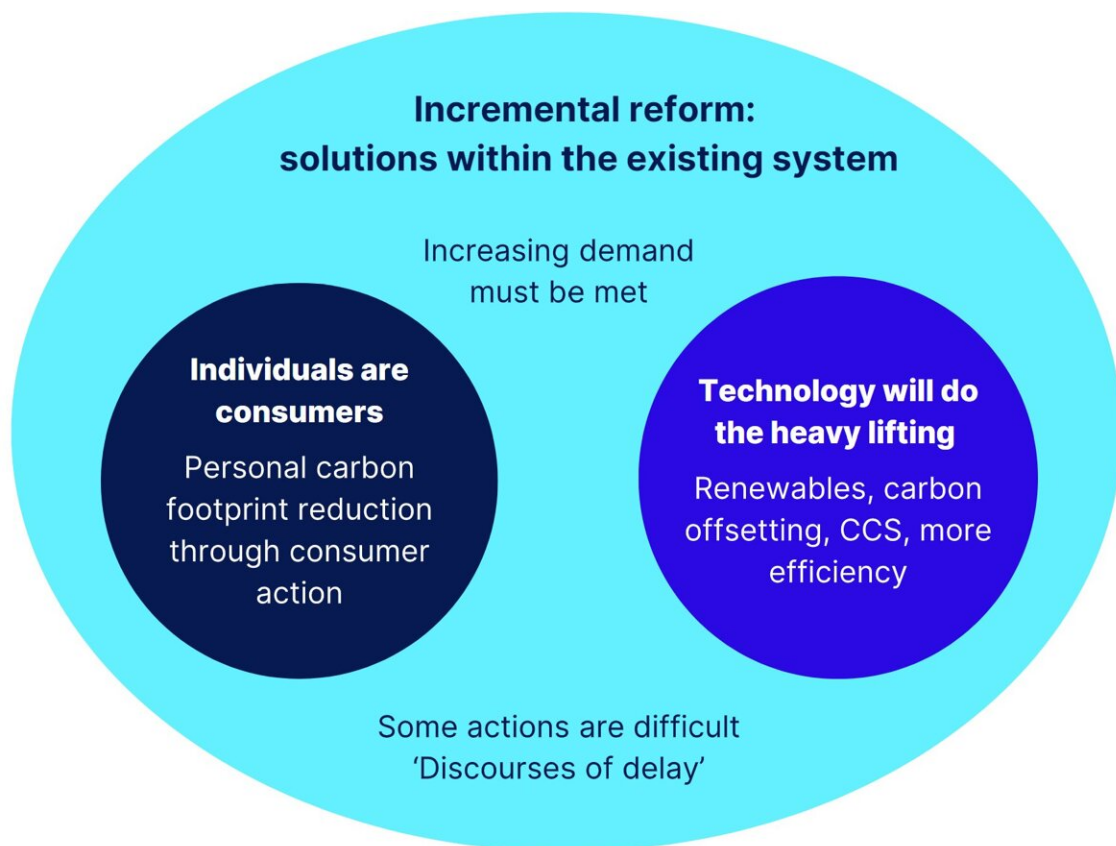


Secondary education needs to empower students to respond to climate emergency, says UK report

October 5 2023, by Andy Dunne



Credit: *Zenodo* (2023). DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8360306

The UK government needs to do more to equip schools with the

materials and resources to teach young people about climate change and their role in responding to it by refocusing the school curriculum, according to the authors of new research.

The new report—[a policy brief](#) from the University of Bath's [Institute for Policy Research](#) (IPR)—explores how secondary school curricula across the UK's four nations could be better aligned to support the UK government's binding commitment to reach net zero by 2050.

According to the [Climate Change Committee](#) and recent House of Lords [Net zero and Behaviour Change report](#), around 60% of future emission reductions will involve lifestyle and behavior changes, re-considering what we buy, what we eat, as well as how and why we travel.

[Previous research](#) from the University of Bath highlights how [young people](#) are increasingly aware of [climate change](#), and are eager to play their part, yet often lack the skills and knowledge to know where to start. This lack of agency may in part fuel rising levels of eco-anxiety observed in young people.

According to the latest DfE guidance, teachers are currently advised to be 'impartial' when teaching about responding to [climate](#) change—a term the researchers suggest is highly ambiguous and unhelpful. Young people—who will be disproportionately affected—need a clear understanding of what the transition to net zero means for them, they say.

Through new analysis of national curricula for schools in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the IPR [policy brief](#) finds that 'climate change' as a topic in schools is typically limited to Geography and Science lessons. The researchers say it could play a far bigger role across other subject areas.

For example, instead of presenting climate change as principally a scientific challenge—requiring technological solutions—it could also be incorporated into other subject areas, such as English, DT and Art. This could offer young people different ways to engage in the subject, including by thinking about the different kinds of social changes required.

Acknowledging that schools are currently limited in their ability to stray beyond curricula, the IPR brief calls on education policy makers to rethink how responding to climate change can be better addressed at [school](#). Examples of good practice are already emerging internationally, including through the International Baccalaureate, which could be expanded.

In the UK, they point to the work of the ['Ministry of Eco Education'](#)—an organization spearheaded by Dale Vince, that collates resources to help schools and teachers embed sustainability across the curricula—as well as an initiative from the [Royal Meteorological Society](#) that incorporates content about climate change across the English curricula.

Lead researcher, Dr. Katharine Lee of the University's Department of Psychology said, "In the face of rising [global temperatures](#) and the ever-increasing risks posed by climate change, we know young people want more information about this topic, and they want to play their part as active citizens.

"This can help channel their frustrations and passions, and enable them to become powerful agents of change. Currently our approach is too often siloed, and the wider actions and roles young people as citizens can play are ignored. By giving young people the tools to respond, we will help equip them with the skills they will need in the future.

"We need to remember that today's 13-year-olds will be 40 in 2050—by

which point the UK needs to have achieved net zero. The impact of climate change will be ever-present in their lives, and our transition to net zero will play a significant part in shaping their lives and future careers."

More information: Katharine Lee, What do secondary school children across the four UK nations learn about resolving climate change? Comparisons, implications, and recommendations, *Zenodo* (2023). [DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8360306](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8360306)

Provided by University of Bath

Citation: Secondary education needs to empower students to respond to climate emergency, says UK report (2023, October 5) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-secondary-empower-students-climate-emergency.html>

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