

A BERA  
RESEARCH  
COMMISSION

# EDUCATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

## A MANIFESTO

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS  
JULY 2021

# 2021



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*



Centre for Alternative Technology  
Canolfan y Dechnoleg Amgen



# SUMMARY

Humanity faces a climate crisis. Education is needed to help the next generation to adapt and respond to challenges associated with the changing climate. Changes are needed to ensure that education meets the needs of teachers and young people in the context of sustainability. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) Research Commission 2021 brings together teachers and young people from across the UK to create a manifesto for change. This brief communicates headline messages for school leaders. The manifesto produced will be launched to coincide with COP26 the UN 2021 Climate Change Conference.



## ABOUT THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to analyse where we are now with education for environmental sustainability, what change is needed, and the barriers to this change. In May and June 2021, nine 2-hour online workshops were held. Responses from 200 young people and teachers from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were recorded, with 34 from young people with declared additional educational needs.



## KEY QUESTIONS

The questions the research commission set out to answer were:

- What is the current context for education for environmental sustainability, and what do we need?
- What can we learn from others' experiences of education for environmental sustainability?
- What could the future of education for environmental sustainability look like?



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Young people and teachers identified barriers to education for environmental sustainability in schools. These were:

- **SYSTEMIC:** Undervaluing of environmental sustainability in government policy, budgetary constraints for schools, the nature of the curriculum and assessment.
- **SCHOOL LEVEL:** Prioritising economic considerations in decision-making, teacher workload, exam pressures and constraints, and insufficient confidence, knowledge and agency for all members of the school community.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Young people and teachers saw education for environmental sustainability as learning to live differently to protect, preserve and mend the environment for current and future generations.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Young people and teachers identified solutions at different scales including those for the classroom, our schools, our local communities and at policy level, calling on school leaders to:



## REVIEW

Identify ways that sustainability can feature in existing school-level policies and contracts e.g. school improvement plan, transport plan, waste and recycling contracts and the school curriculum.



## TIME

Give students space and time to learn about climate change and environmental sustainability - without linking to assessment. For example through research projects, learning how to change, and developing youth activism.



## VOICE

Place student voice and agency at the core of school's sustainability work so that students can learn how schools work and can lead action. This could be through student councils and elected green teams.



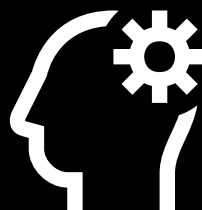
## CHOICE

Make the sustainable choice the convenient choice - in school grounds, cafeterias and classrooms - so that it is visible and straightforward for people to live, work and learn sustainably.



## LEAD

Appoint a school sustainability lead akin to the SENCO to co-ordinate action on sustainability across the school e.g. curriculum, recycling, resource choices, form time as 'sustainability' time.



## GROW

Provide teachers with the time and resources to engage in sustainability focused professional development to grow confidence and to incorporate sustainability within their teaching - whatever the subject.



## VALUE

Represent sustainability in school leadership teams, committees and governing bodies. Each decision-making body should have someone to advocate for environmental sustainability.



## HEALTH

Promote healthy diets and healthy environments to tackle eco-anxiety. This includes indoor and outdoor learning spaces in schools, and will involve work with cafeteria and grounds staff.



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# NEXT STEPS

- Production of an illustrated manifesto with artist Maisy Summer.
- Manifesto launch in November 2021 to coincide with COP26. We encourage school leaders to sign a pledge to:
  - Recognise the importance of young people's and teachers' perspectives in making decisions about education for environmental sustainability
  - Commit to review the place and future of education for environmental sustainability within their own organisations' vision, strategy and practices in the year following COP26.
  - Respond to the implications for schools.



For commission homepage scan QR code.

## ABOUT

BERA Research Commissions identify and address issues of current importance to the study and practice of education – specifically those likely to prove consequential to the future of the discipline and its research communities. Generating new empirical evidence and theoretically rigorous analysis, they make recommendations for how educational research, and BERA in particular, can respond to the challenges and opportunities arising from the changing nature of education across the four nations of the UK.

### COMMISSION CO-LEADS

#### Dr Lynda Dunlop

Senior Lecturer in Science Education  
University of York

#### Dr Elizabeth Rushton

Lecturer in Geography Education  
King's College London

### VISIT

- [www.york.ac.uk/education/research/uyseg/research-projects/manifesto-efes/](http://www.york.ac.uk/education/research/uyseg/research-projects/manifesto-efes/)
- [routesjournal.org/projects/bera/](http://routesjournal.org/projects/bera/)

To attend the launch of the manifesto 17:00-18:00 on 1st November 2021 contact [lynda.dunlop@york.ac.uk](mailto:lynda.dunlop@york.ac.uk).

### COMMISSION PRINCIPAL PARTNERS

- Jacquie Ayre, Liverpool World Centre
- Dr Andrea Bullivant, Liverpool World Centre, TEESNet
- Dr Jane Essex, Senior Lecturer in Chemistry Education, Strathclyde University,
- Faye Laverick and Alister Talbot, Huntington Research School
- Dr Cyrus Nayeri, Geography Teacher and Editor in Chief, Routes – the Journal for Student Geographers
- Michelle Ryan, Association for Science Education Northern Ireland Field Officer
- Smriti Safaya, University of York
- Amanda Smith, Education and Training Manager, Centre for Alternative Technology, Wales
- Judy Ling Wong, Honorary President, Black Environment Network



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