



Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education

29 April 2021

Dear Gavin

Climate change in education

As part of our inquiry on Net Zero and the UN Climate Summits my Committee recently took evidence from Anna Brown and Josh Tredale, two members of the ‘Teach the Future’ campaign which is led by students in secondary and tertiary education. They raised several concerns about existing coverage of climate change in education which I would like to draw to your attention. This is a matter of interest for my Committee, as the Department for BEIS is responsible for coordinating climate mitigation policy across Government.

Teach the Future assert that climate change is poorly addressed in formal education across the UK, and that this omission means that young people are not being equipped with the tools they will need to deal with “the biggest issue of [their] generation”. Where climate change is taught, the focus tends to be on scientific and technical aspects, overlooking social dimensions such as how climate change impacts are already affecting people’s lives (and how these impacts are expected to increase in the future), and the changes that the transition to a net zero economy will entail for life in the UK. Survey evidence supports the claim that current provision is insufficient: 42% of young people aged 9-18 say they have learnt a little, hardly anything or nothing about the environment at school, but 68% want to learn more about the environment and climate change.¹ Similarly 69% of teachers think there should be more teaching about climate change in UK schools, but 75% feel they haven’t received adequate training to educate their students about it.²

The Climate Change Committee’s advice to Government on the Sixth Carbon Budget recommended that provision of climate-relevant subjects should be better incorporated into formal education and skills policy, including education in schools, because the transition to a net zero economy will demand different skills of workers. Last September Climate Assembly UK recommended that “informing and educating everyone” about climate change should be the top priority principle underpinning the Government’s path to net zero.

Teach the Future also stated that youth voices are not being listened to by the Government, despite the disproportionately greater impact that climate change is expected to have on younger generations over the course of their lifetime. To date the group have made 18 requests to discuss climate education with yourself, but they are still awaiting a response. This is in contrast to the strong engagement and support which the international youth ‘Mock COP’ initiative (established

¹ [Green Schools Project / NUS pupil survey](#), December 2018

² [UKSCN / Oxfam teachers survey](#), May 2019

by Teach the Future members) has received from the Cabinet Office COP26 Unit, including from the COP26 President-Designate.

I would be grateful if you could provide answers to the following by 21 May.

1. Will you meet with members of the Teach the Future campaign to discuss their concerns?
2. What plans does the Government have to review how climate change is incorporated into the UK's formal education systems, and how well it is preparing young people for future impacts of climate change and the transition to net zero? How will you coordinate with the devolved administrations on any such activity?
3. How will the Government ensure that any changes to better incorporate climate change in the curriculum are developed in consultation with young people themselves? How will the Government ensure these changes are supported by additional training provision for teachers on climate change, and/or resource to recruit teachers who are climate specialists?
4. In its 2020 Progress Report the CCC recommended that the Department for Education "[c]onsider the wider role of the education system in supporting the transition to a net-zero economy and preparing for the risks of climate change - including the need for greater public awareness and understanding, and the need for technical skills in the workforce." How does your Department plan to address this recommendation, and what progress have you already made?
5. The Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) dialogues at COP26 will include discussions around education and training on climate change. How is the Department for Education engaging with the Cabinet Office COP26 Unit to support this activity? Would you support a move to increase international reporting requirements on climate education and training as part of the UNFCCC process?

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Darren Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D' and 'J'.

DARREN JONES MP

CHAIR, BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE