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[Home](#) > [Environment](#) > [Climate change and energy](#) > [Climate change adaptation](#)

Guidance

Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education

The Department for Education's (DfE) sustainability leadership and climate action plans initiative.

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Applies to England

Contents

- [Overview](#)
- [Why this is important](#)
- [Identifying your sustainability leadership structure](#)
- [A whole-setting approach](#)
- [Climate action plans](#)
- [What is needed if you have already started](#)
- [Further detail about support to come](#)
- [How to get started \(if you have not already\)](#)



Overview

A key initiative of DfE's [sustainability and climate change strategy for education](#) is 'sustainability leadership and climate action plans'.

The strategy states: "By 2025, all education settings will have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan". This includes early years settings, schools, multi-academy trusts, colleges, and universities.

Sustainability leadership could be a group of people or an individual responsible for the development and implementation of a climate action plan.

A climate action plan is a detailed plan to enable your education setting, or trust, to progress or commence sustainability initiatives.

There are many organisations providing courses, products, and services to support an education setting's approach to climate change. There are also many examples of excellent practice when it comes to sustainability and climate change in the education sector, and your individual setting or trust may already have a plan in place. Where this is the case we are not suggesting that you create a new plan, but you may find that some of the non-statutory guidance below supplements what

you are already doing.

We want to help every setting engage with the support it needs. From December 2023 we will begin to roll out a free programme of support including:

- a digital hub of resources, best practice, and tools which will help you develop, or build on, your climate action plan
- access to a network of regional coordinators who will provide local expert support and peer to peer learning opportunities

Why this is important

Our engagement has highlighted that settings and trusts have the greatest success in driving change where there is a holistic action plan that is supported by a leadership team with the authority, knowledge, and commitment to take it forward.

Ensuring you have clear leadership for sustainability in place, and a climate action plan, will help your setting to:

- increase the confidence and expertise of your leadership team, staff, learners, and students in understanding climate change and how positive change can be achieved
- create a culture that prioritises sustainability
- share effective practice with other education settings and develop a peer-to-peer learning network
- use data to identify and prioritise action
- improve energy and water efficiency
- calculate your carbon emissions and identify ways to reduce them
- reduce operating costs
- increase resilience and start adapting to the impacts of climate change
- enhance biodiversity
- help learners develop skills and knowledge which help them to contribute to sustainability and climate change in their lives and future jobs

Identifying your sustainability leadership structure

Though it is up to each individual setting or trust to decide the structure of their sustainability leadership team, best practice shows that change is delivered when driven by a diverse team of passionate individuals. It is important that both educational (for example, teaching staff) and operational (for example, estates management) expertise is brought to this team.

The presence of senior leaders from your organisation is critical for planning and implementation to be successful. They have the authority, capacity, and support to influence and lead strategic change within the setting.

You may choose to take an individual setting approach to building sustainability leadership, set it up across a multi-academy trust (if your setting is a member of one), or both.

A whole-setting approach

It is important that the whole education setting, or trust, is engaged so that planning becomes action.

Learners

Involving children, young people and learners is important in climate action planning.

Doing so can:

- inspire their enthusiasm to help drive positive change
- increase their practical knowledge of sustainability and climate change
- give young people a sense of agency where anxiety stems from climate concerns
- create a sense of pride in their education setting
- enable them to share their knowledge and enthusiasm in their local communities
- enable them to engage their parents, carers, and wider community in sustainability and climate change

Senior leadership team (SLT), governors, trustees and executive leaders

As senior decision makers, SLT and governors should support and drive your sustainable activity. They should:

- provide the authority and support to drive and embed culture change
- ensure climate change and sustainability feature on the agenda at key meetings
- be responsible for succession planning, so that commitment to sustainability endures in the setting

Estates management

It is important your estates manager or management team inform your plan as they will have the knowledge required to enact more sustainable practices.

The [performance management and sustainability](#) section of the good estate management for schools guidance explains the role of estates management in encouraging sustainability and managing energy and water use.

For settings in further and higher education, a sector specific methodology for calculating carbon emissions, based on the greenhouse gas protocol, has been published by EAUC – the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education. This follows collaboration with participants of the Platinum Jubilee Challenge, the Royal Anniversary Trust, the Association of Colleges, Colleges Scotland and Universities UK.

[The standardised carbon emissions framework for further and higher education](#) aims to:

- give confidence to institutions who want to start monitoring
- ensure transparency and comparability between institutions who report their emissions

Climate action plans

Creating a climate action plan will allow you to take a structured

and strategic route toward ensuring your setting or trust is acting toward, and educating about, sustainability. You may choose to have a climate action plan that sits within an individual setting, or across a trust, or both.

A climate action plan should typically cover the following 4 areas, to align with [DfE's sustainability and climate change strategy](#):

- decarbonisation, for example calculating and taking actions to reduce carbon emissions, such as becoming more energy efficient
- adaptation and resilience, such as taking actions to reduce the risk of flooding and overheating
- biodiversity, for example engaging with the [National Education Nature Park and enrolling in the Climate Action Award](#)
- climate education and green careers, such as ensuring the education you provide gives knowledge-rich and comprehensive teaching about climate change, and that your teaching staff and lecturers feel supported to offer this

What is needed if you have already started

Your setting or trust may already have an environmental plan or sustainability strategy in place and may already be calculating its emissions. Equally you may also be working with one of the many excellent organisations who help education settings address sustainability.

Our approach is not designed to duplicate planning and action that has already taken place. We recognise that different settings are at different stages of this journey. That is why the further support set out below is designed to ensure that settings are supported with further and complimentary information, regardless of where they are currently at in their journey.

Further detail about support to come

From December 2023, we will begin to roll out a programme of further support for the education sector. We will provide access to:

- a sustainability leadership digital hub which will signpost to training, guidance and support offered by quality assured organisations working in this space depending on what your setting needs and already has in place. Settings who require this specific training will be able to access carbon literacy training via this hub
- a network of local experts and peer to peer support that can assist you in establishing your sustainability leadership structure and develop and implement your action plan

In the sustainability and climate change strategy published in April 2022, we committed to “rolling out carbon literacy training to all settings”. Having carried out user research and policy development since that date, we understand that each setting will have different support requirements and a single training offer would not be appropriate. We will provide support through the approach set out above, reflecting the different needs of each setting. The digital hub will signpost to carbon literacy training for all those that need it.

How to get started (if you have not already)

The following contains links, organised by sector, to demonstrate how some education settings have started this journey and to highlight some of the tools already available to settings. This is just a small selection of examples. There are many more settings also doing excellent work on this.

All settings

- Register with the [National Education Nature Park and Climate Action Awards scheme](#)

Early years settings

- Read Dr Diane Boyd’s [sustainability matters in early childhood resource](#), developed and written in partnership with NCFE
- Read the [London Early Years Foundation sustainability strategy](#)

Schools

- Read about Shinfield St Mary's CE Junior School's work around [sustainability and ecology](#)
- Read about St Vincent's School, a specialist school for sensory impairment and other needs, and [their sustainability projects](#). These include activities such as:
 - Reclaim the Green, Reclaim the Nature
 - RHS Tatton Park 2022
 - Mersey Region S.S.N
 - Citzenships, Comics & Action
- Read about [Upper Batley High School's sustainability journey](#) (PDF, 100 KB, 2 pages)
- Read DfE's [good estate management for schools guidance](#)
- Consult the [National Governance Association's greener governance campaign](#)
- Read DfE's [guidance on energy efficiency](#)

Further education settings

- Read the [climate action roadmap for UK FE colleges](#) created by the Association of Colleges, EAUC – the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education, GuildHE and Universities UK partnered through the [Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education](#)
- Read DfE's [guidance on energy efficiency](#)

Higher education settings

- Read about the [University of Reading's sustainability strategy statement](#) (PDF, 94.4 KB, 2 pages)
- Read about Manchester Metropolitan University's [sustainability strategies](#)
- Read the [higher education climate action toolkit](#) created by the Association of Colleges, EAUC – the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education, GuildHE and Universities UK partnered through the [Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education](#)

Share your sustainability journey

We are collecting case studies for use in communications and guidance as we further develop our support.

If you would like to share your experience with others, please send a live website link to your sustainability strategy or send a written submission to DfE's Sustainability and Climate Change Unit: dfesustainability@education.gov.uk

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