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exchanging views, inspiring minds

Report

Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives

William Finnegan



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Foreword



This Cumberland Lodge report presents our independent research into the climate crisis, with a resounding call to action from engaged young people of diverse backgrounds, from across the UK and around the world, to the policymakers, young people and officials taking part in the global PreCOP26 and COP26 climate summits in 2021.

We are grateful to all the organisations and initiatives that have supported and guided this project, and to all the young people and climate specialists who gave of their time so freely to contribute to the following report.

In 2020, we commissioned William Finnegan, a doctoral researcher at the University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute and an award-winning environmental filmmaker, to support us in this work as a freelance Research Associate. Bill was tasked with examining the state of play in climate science, policy and youth activism, and producing an informative briefing document to guide discussions at **Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives**, the intergenerational conference we convened online in March 2021. His pre-conference briefing is presented as Part I of this report.

Part II summarises the key themes of discussion from this conference and presents a statement by the young people who took part, with their priorities for climate action. It ends with an urgent message from young people to act without delay and to think carefully about the legacy we are leaving for our children.

This report is part of the All4Climate programme of events accompanying the PreCOP26 meetings in Milan. We hope that it inspires people everywhere to take meaningful action to help safeguard our climate futures.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edmund Newell".

Dr Edmund Newell

Chief Executive, Cumberland Lodge

About the author



William Finnegan was commissioned to support our **Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives** project as a freelance Research Associate, and took part in our March 2021 conference and June 2021 consultation.

Bill is a doctoral researcher at the University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute, exploring secondary-school energy and climate programmes and youth climate activism in the UK. He was also selected to join the doctoral enrichment scheme at the Alan Turing Institute, the UK's national institute for data science and artificial intelligence.

In 2003, Bill co-founded Tamarack Media Cooperative, a digital communications firm that supports a wide range of environmental organisations. Bill's documentary films and multimedia productions have appeared on US public television, the BBC, and in film festivals around the world, and he is also a contributor to the online publication *The Conversation*.

Bill won the Director's Award from the North American Association for Environmental Education in 2016, a TogetherGreen Fellowship from the National Audubon Society and Toyota in 2010, and the New Voices Award from J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism in the USA, in 2007.

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Executive summary

Climate change has been characterised as a ‘wicked problem’¹ – a complex socio-technical issue, with no simple solution. Hence, our response must be multifaceted and cut across government policy, corporate responsibility, individual choices and social transformations.

Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives, a virtual Cumberland Lodge conference held over the course a fortnight in March 2021, gave young people a platform to express their climate ideas, visions and expectations ahead of the international PreCOP26 Youth4Climate summit in Milan and COP26, the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference taking place in Glasgow in November 2021.

Young people from schools, colleges, universities and youth organisations, across the UK and around the world, met online with civil servants, charity representatives, activists, community practitioners and academics, to explore different perspectives on, and priorities for, climate futures. During the conference, delegates had the chance to hear from a raft of high-profile speakers, to take part in live polls and question-and-answer sessions, and to join intergenerational breakout-room discussions.

This report combines our pre-conference briefing with a conference statement prepared by the young people who took part in these discussions, outlining their key concerns and priorities for action. Part I sets out the state of our knowledge of climate science and provides an overview of the key impacts of climate change, before presenting current research and examples of action being taken in relation to key dimensions of the climate crisis. These include climate policy, climate education, green careers, individual and collective adaptation to change, and youth activism. Part II summarises key themes of discussion from the Cumberland Lodge conference, and presents our practical, policy-focused recommendations for climate action.

An estimated 1.2 billion young people were born between 1997 and 2006.² They were born after scientific consensus and government commitments on climate change, and they have lived their entire lives with the climate crisis looming over their futures. Every day, young

people wake up to growing evidence of the devastating impacts of climate change on human communities and the natural world. They are frustrated at the slow pace of action and tired of waiting for the machinery of politics and capitalism.

Young people of diverse genders, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds, from across the UK and around the world, call for immediate and urgent action at all levels of government, business and civil society, to rise to the challenge of responding to the climate emergency.

Conference statement summary

We, the young people who gathered at the Cumberland Lodge virtual conference, Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives, offer the following recommendations to the international delegations and other stakeholders preparing for the UNFCCC COP26 summit in Glasgow.

Please work with us: we are your partners, and only by working together can we make a better future possible.

We urge you to urgently implement the following initiatives and democratic reforms, to safeguard our interests and involve us more meaningfully in decision-making that affects our futures.

1. As an outcome of COP26, create a Youth Climate Parliament to facilitate international and intergenerational dialogue on climate solutions and resilience, over the next decade.
2. Lower the voting age to 16 years old, in line with the Scottish model.
3. Conduct citizens' assemblies on climate action, building on the successful use of citizens' assemblies on politically divisive issues in Ireland.
4. Protect the interests of future generations with legislation that requires public bodies to adequately consider the long-term impacts of their decision-making, following the example of the Welsh Well-being of Future Generations Act.

We want more than commitments; we demand accountability.

5. Ensure that international agreements and national commitments are backed by legally binding, fully funded climate policies, with clear penalties set out for any failure to meet emissions reduction targets.
6. Allocate 5% of GDP to addressing the climate crisis – an amount reflected in ambitious Green New Deal policies – to help ensure a habitable planet for future generations.
7. Require finance ministers to report annually on climate spending across all departments.
8. All parties to the Paris Agreement must immediately align and expedite all areas of domestic policy in response to the climate emergency, bringing the same energy and urgency to safeguarding our collective future that we see during a financial crash, pandemic or natural disaster.

Climate policy must be integrated with social and economic policy and funded by the actors who have benefited the most from environmental degradation.

9. Ensure that carbon taxes are targeted at the wealthiest in society.
10. Require fossil fuel companies to fund carbon capture and storage initiatives.
11. Ensure that the process of decarbonising our economy is fair and that the basic needs of humanity are met sustainably.

Education is failing to prepare us for the future and must be reformed.

12. Legislate for education reform that incorporates sustainability and climate change across the formal curriculum.
13. Support the progression of The Education (Environment and Sustainable Citizenship) Bill through Parliament, ahead of hosting COP26.

Governments must actively support green businesses and invest in green jobs.

14. Invest in Government-funded green apprenticeships.
15. Encourage organisations to pursue B-Corp certification, to guide the rapid adoption of more sustainable business practice.

Treat fossil fuels like the threat to our future that they are.

16. Adopt a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty, to send a clear message to the energy industry and investors that the era of fossil fuel extraction is over.

Net-zero carbon solutions must result in biodiversity net-gain.

17. All parties to the Paris Agreement must now review their NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) for tackling the climate crisis in light of the impact of climate policies on biodiversity.

This is a decade of consequence. What happens in Glasgow will resonate around the world, but whilst COP26 is a milestone, what matters the most is what we do next.

As young people, we urge you to think about the legacy you want to leave for future generations. We are looking ahead to the future with both worry and curiosity. We seek the resilience – in ourselves and our communities – to adapt to a changing world.

We are excited about the opportunity to work with older generations to craft a better future; to bring long-term thinking and creativity to the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and social equity.

We never asked to be youth climate activists, and we should not need to be, but we will be paying attention to everything you agree to and will collectively hold you accountable for your climate commitments.

At some point you will pass the torch to us, and we will continue this work and tell your story to future generations. But we need your help now.

Act with courage in 2021 and your children and grandchildren will thank you.





I.

A review





Introduction to Part I

Climate change will shape the future. Through environmental destruction and pollution – mostly as a result of the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas – we have changed the composition of the atmosphere. The global average atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) has risen from 280 parts per million (ppm) before the Industrial Revolution to over 400 ppm in the past decade.³ As a consequence of how CO₂ and other greenhouse gases absorb heat, average global temperatures have increased by 1°C from pre-industrial temperatures and are on a trajectory to increase by an additional 0.2°C per decade.⁴ The [2015 Paris Climate Agreement](#) aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C, to avoid devastating consequences to natural and human systems.⁵

Our changing climate can feel disconnected from our daily life, due to the distance in time and space between the actions that lead to global heating and their impacts. Our carbon-intensive lifestyles today, from frequent flights to daily meat consumption, will result in global climate disruptions and localised natural disasters such as flooding and wildfires in the future, with poorer countries and communities bearing the brunt of this impact. The basic injustice of climate change – the fact that some people suffer the costs of two centuries of planet-altering industrialisation whilst not fully participating in the benefits – is even more extreme when considering future generations. In terms of intergenerational climate justice, we are shaping up to be bad ancestors, having benefited from economic growth and improvements in our quality of life, whilst leaving behind a world stretched beyond the ‘planetary boundaries’ of ecological stability and resilience.⁶

About 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 – the largest youth generation in global history – were born after the science of human-caused climate change was settled and the political process to address this problem began.⁷ As these people continue their studies, enter the workforce and participate in

democratic processes, the uncertainty and anxiety of the climate crisis hangs over their futures. Youth perspectives on climate are perhaps best illustrated through the handmade signs found at the [Fridays for Future](#) protests: *There is no planet B; System change not climate change; You'll die of old age – we'll die of climate change.* And, of course, the sign that launched a movement and turned [Greta Thunberg](#) into a household name: *Skolstrejk för klimatet* ('*School strike for climate*').

Part I of this report provides an overview of current research and thinking about the climate crisis, and action being taken to address it, through the lens of youth: policy, education, green careers, adaptation and grassroots action. It was originally published as a briefing document to guide and inform discussions at the intergenerational Cumberland Lodge conference, **Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives**, which was held online in March 2021. It has been republished here to set the scene for the conference statement and youth-led recommendations that follow in Part II, and to serve as a useful resource for anyone who works in this field or is interested in what we can all do to safeguard our climate.

What is our climate future? Will the climate crisis spiral out of control, resulting in a dystopian collapse of modern civilisation? Can technological innovation and collective political action bring about social transformation and a green utopia? Or will we navigate the many shades of 'staying with the trouble' that lie between dystopia and utopia?⁸ Young people are more than passive victims of the climate crisis – all around the world they are rising up as powerful agents of change. Our planet's future lies in these hands.

2

Climate science and impact

At the outset, let us briefly address the state of our knowledge of climate science and providing an overview of the key impacts of climate change.

The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), an unprecedented and ambitious scientific collaboration, has played a major role in informing our understanding of this issue. The IPCC was established by the UN Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization, in 1988. Scientists involved in the IPCC volunteer their time to synthesise the latest peer-reviewed research on climate science, climate change impacts and climate change mitigation (which involves actions to limit the amount or rate of global warming and its related effects).

In 2007, the IPCC and the United States' Vice President Al Gore were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, 'for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change'.⁹

Our current understanding of climate change is captured in the IPCC's comprehensive *Fifth Assessment Report (AR5)*, which was completed in 2014.¹⁰ An updated *Sixth Assessment Report* is currently being finalised. In 2018, the IPCC published the influential *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C*, which emphasised that the next ten years would be a decade of consequence for climate action.¹¹

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AR5 clearly concludes that humans are changing the climate (which is referred to as *anthropogenic* change – being generated by humans). It states that:

Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have increased since the pre-industrial era, driven largely by economic and population growth, and are now higher than ever. This has led to atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide that are unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years. Their effects, together with those of other anthropogenic drivers, have been detected throughout the climate system and are extremely likely to have been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.¹²

The IPCC indicates the certainty of its report findings, both in terms of the amount of evidence to support the claim and the level of scientific agreement. ‘Extremely likely’ is defined as a statement made with 95-100% confidence – representing both high agreement and robust evidence. Systematic reviews of published articles reflect a similar level of scientific consensus, with over 97% of peer-reviewed articles agreeing that humans are causing climate change.¹³

Systematic reviews of published articles reflect a similar level of scientific consensus, with over 97% of peer-reviewed articles agreeing that humans are causing climate change.

AR5 also goes into great detail about observed and potential impacts of climate change to both natural and human systems. Raising average global temperatures by a few degrees may not sound that serious, and may be even presented, flippantly, as a positive development in temperate climates, but the results on the ground can be devastating. Changes in weather patterns – ranging from drought to flooding – impact food systems, and extreme weather events and wildfires are both deadly and destructive. In 2020, there were 22 climate-related disasters in the US that each cost over \$1 billion, making it the sixth consecutive year with over ten billion-dollar weather and climate disaster events.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the instability of climate change

also amplifies existing threats, from biodiversity loss to armed conflict.

Based on current trends, by 2070, parts of the planet that are home to 3.5 billion people will experience annual average temperatures of over 29°C – potentially intolerable conditions for a third of the global population.¹⁵ Resulting climate migration (where people are displaced from their homes by extreme heat, disasters and insecurity) and fears about a wave of incoming climate refugees might fuel xenophobia and lead to tighter immigration restrictions, and with this in mind, researchers have been calling for more work and dialogue on this issue.¹⁶

This brief survey of climate science and impacts is a necessary prelude to any discussion about climate change, but it is worth restating and emphasising the overwhelming scientific consensus that people are changing the climate and that this is having serious consequences for both the natural world and human societies.

The science is settled. The scale of the problem is clear. The question is: what will we do about it?

3

Climate policy

Climate change is a global, systemic problem that cannot be prevented by individual behaviour changes or a single, ambitious country working in isolation. For the past 28 years, the United Nations has convened and facilitated the international climate policy effort. This dates back to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro – a milestone in sustainable development – at which the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#) was launched.¹⁷ As an international treaty, the UNFCCC came into force in 1994, with 166 countries as signatories, and it now has 197 parties (196 countries plus the European Union). Negotiations and progress reports take place at an annual [Conference of the Parties \(COP\)](#), a large gathering that includes policymakers and representatives from civil society, including young people, indigenous peoples and other constituencies.

From the Paris Agreement to COP26

Two additional international agreements have been negotiated and adopted under the UNFCCC, since the early 1990s. The 1997 [Kyoto Protocol](#) added clarity to global CO₂ emissions reduction commitments and processes for reporting and co-operation.¹⁸ The 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) set a goal of limiting global heating to well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial global average temperatures, with the ambition to limit warming to 1.5°C.¹⁹ To this end, the Paris Agreement calls for greenhouse gas emissions to peak as soon as possible, so that net-zero emissions might be achieved by the second half of this century. ‘Net zero’ is when sources of greenhouse gas emissions are balanced out by ‘sinks’ that absorb similar quantities of these gases; for example, through nature-based solutions like ecological restoration and tree planting, or through carbon capture and storage technologies.

The Paris Agreement requires countries to agree nationally determined contributions (NDCs), which are national climate

plans, outlining how they are working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Every five years, each country needs to revisit their NDC and adopt a more ambitious plan, in what is known as the 'ratchet mechanism'.²⁰ COP26 in Glasgow is an opportunity to both review the enhanced ambitions of the second round of NDCs and to sort out some lingering details of the Paris Agreement, especially with respect to carbon markets (where emissions reductions are traded between countries).²¹

The 2015 Paris Agreement set a goal of limiting global heating to well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial global average temperatures, with the ambition to limit warming to 1.5°C.

Mock COP26

When COP26 was delayed from 2020 to 2021, a network of young climate activists decided to host their own international climate conference, online. With support from the UK charity [Students Organising for Sustainability](#), which grew out of the environmental programmes of the National Union of Students, Mock COP26 involved 350 delegates from 140 countries. The resulting [declaration](#) outlines 18 policies, covering education, justice, resilient livelihoods, physical and mental health, biodiversity and the NDCs.

UK climate policy

UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was an early advocate for international co-operation to address climate change. In 1990, in response to the first IPCC assessment report, Thatcher commented:

The danger of global warming is as yet unseen, but real enough for us to make changes and sacrifices, so that we do not live at the expense of future generations.... I see the adoption of these policies as a sort of premium on insurance against fire, flood or

*other disaster. It may be cheaper or more cost-effective to take action now than to wait and find we have to pay much more later.*²²

In 2008, UK leadership on climate policy was reinforced by the trailblazing [Climate Change Act](#), which received strong cross-party support (only three Members of Parliament voted against it).²³ The key components of the UK's climate law include:

- **A long-term emissions reduction target** – set in an amendment to the Climate Change Act in 2019, to commit the UK to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 (the original target was an 80% reduction in emissions, compared to the 1990 baseline used by the Kyoto Protocol)
- **The creation of the Committee on Climate Change (CCC)** – an independent advisory body, now called the [Climate Change Committee](#), chaired by the UK's longest-serving Secretary of State for the Environment (1993 – 1997), Lord Deben
- **Statutory five-year carbon budgets, set 12 years in advance** – the Sixth Carbon Budget, which covers 2033 – 2037, was published by the CCC in December 2020
- **A five-year cycle of the Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) and National Adaptation Programme (NAP)** – the second iteration of the NAP was published in 2018, outlining the actions that the Government and others will take to adapt to the challenges of climate change in the UK.²⁴

In 2019, the confluence of youth climate strikes, Extinction Rebellion protests and the broadcast of a Sir David Attenborough documentary, [Climate Change – The Facts](#), led to increased public awareness and heightened political pressure in the UK.²⁵ In response, Parliament declared a 'climate emergency' and updated the Climate Change Act to enshrine the UK's 2050 net-zero commitment in law, and the House of Commons-convoked [Climate Assembly UK](#), a citizens' assembly on climate change.

Green New Deal

Over the past year, the coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns around the world have stalled the momentum of both the youth climate movement and international climate policy. But this unprecedented pause in normal life has also illustrated how quickly societies can change; for example, with respect to dramatically reducing travel and working from home. As economies around the world emerge from COVID-19 and the resultant economic downturn, there will be growing calls for a green pandemic recovery.²⁶

Large-scale government investments in infrastructure and jobs to decarbonise the economy and improve climate resilience are often referred to as 'a Green New Deal', a reference to the New Deal of the 1930s in the United States, which was a massive public works programme initiated by President Franklin Roosevelt in response to the Great Depression. During the 2007–2008 financial crisis, a group in the UK first proposed a Green New Deal as a means of aligning long-term economic policy and environmental sustainability.²⁷ This concept achieved prominence when US legislators Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ed Markey co-sponsored a Green New Deal resolution, and there have also been calls for a Green New Deal for Europe. A diverse group of youth climate activists have been at the forefront of these campaigns; for example, through the US Sunrise Movement and Green New Deal UK.

Ahead of COP26, the Conservative government continues to highlight the UK's leadership role in fighting climate change. The UK has made progress, by cutting greenhouse gas emissions by over 45% compared to 1990 levels – the largest relative reduction in the world.²⁸ This has been largely achieved by decarbonising energy supply, with renewables now generating more electricity than fossil fuels.

The Sixth Carbon Budget calls for a 78% emission reduction by 2035, which will require the widespread electrification of transport and heating, whilst ramping up offshore wind production.²⁹ For example, the UK government is supporting

a shift to electric vehicles by investing £1.3 billion in charging infrastructure and banning the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from the year 2030.³⁰

With falling costs for renewable energy, widespread public support for climate action, and cross-party political consensus on the need for urgent action, the UK is poised to see through these commitments, but a long (and bumpy) road to net zero lies ahead.

The Ten-Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution (BEIS, 2020):³¹

1. Advancing Offshore Wind
2. Driving the Growth of Low Carbon Hydrogen
3. Delivering New and Advanced Nuclear Power
4. Accelerating the Shift to Zero Emission Vehicles
5. Green Public Transport, Cycling and Walking
6. Jet Zero and Green Ships
7. Greener Buildings
8. Investing in Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage
9. Protecting Our Natural Environment
10. Green Finance and Innovation

4

Climate education

Education is an essential component of responding to the climate crisis. Through formal education and informal, lifelong learning, people are able to make more sustainable decisions and work towards systems change and social transformation. Climate education cuts across traditional subjects and disciplines – it encompasses climate science, human and social factors that drive greenhouse gas emissions, technical and political solutions that are required to mitigate climate change, strategies for individual and community adaptation to a changing climate, and the ecological restoration that is required for a more resilient future.³²

Education theorist Gert Biesta describes three dimensions of the purpose of education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification.³³ These can also be applied to climate education, whereby:

- **‘Qualification’** relates to the skills that people will need to navigate smart homes and cities, and to pursue green careers in the future
- **‘Socialisation’** is about developing social norms, or accepted ways of thinking and behaving, that support low-carbon living (but which, wrongly applied, can reinforce patterns of consumption and waste, instead)
- **‘Subjectification’** involves the development of critical thinking, over the course of our education, to equip and enable us to challenge the *status quo*, as illustrated by the student climate strikes.

Environmental and sustainability education

Climate education has grown out of the broader field of environmental education. In 1977, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) organised the

[Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education](#) in Tbilisi, Georgia, which was part of the former Soviet Union.³⁴ It was the middle of the Cold War (1947–1991), but delegations from around the world came together to explore how education could be harnessed to address environmental problems.

In 2005, UNESCO launched the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and the 2015 [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) for 2030 promote both education for sustainable development (Target 4.7) and climate education (Target 13.3 – see below).³⁵ Each SDG is accompanied by a target for 2030, and indicators of how far that target is being met.

Sustainable Development Goal No.13 – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Target 13.3: Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

Indicator 13.3.1: Number of countries that have integrated mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning into primary, secondary and tertiary curricula.

Indicator 13.3.2: Number of countries that have communicated the strengthening of institutional, systemic and individual capacity-building to implement adaptation, mitigation and technology transfer, and development actions.³⁶

The language of the SDGs is echoed in both the UNFCCC (Article 6) and the Paris Agreement (Article 12 – see overleaf). A recent analysis of NDCs found that 95% of countries have referred to some sort of climate education initiatives – mostly relating to public awareness and cognitive understanding of climate change, rather than learning that supports emotional wellbeing or behavioural change.³⁷ However, examples of

comprehensive climate change education at a national level are very limited: Italy now requires one hour a week of climate change and sustainability education for all learners, through established civic education programmes in schools;³⁸ New Zealand has produced a comprehensive climate change education resource – [Climate Change: Prepare Today, Live Well Tomorrow](#) – that includes a focus on wellbeing and the mental health of young people;³⁹ and in the US state of New Jersey has updated its K-12 (Kindergarten to 12th-Grade) school curriculum to integrate climate change study across all its learning standards.⁴⁰

Climate Education and the Paris Agreement

Article 12: Parties shall cooperate in taking measures, as appropriate, to enhance climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information, recognizing the importance of these steps with respect to enhancing actions under this Agreement.⁴¹

The [UK National Association for Environmental Education](#) – which began in 1960 as the National Rural Studies Association – supports environmental educators across the UK through teaching resources and a fellowship program. The Council for Environmental Education was founded in 1968, and in 2008 it evolved into [Sustainability and Environmental Education](#), which promotes the UNESCO ‘whole-school approach’ to sustainability and manages the UK’s Sustainable Schools Alliance. This helps schools to embed sustainability, and learning about sustainability, throughout whole schools and networks of schools.

The [Eco-Schools](#) programme is also very active across the UK. It is managed by a different charity in each of the four nations: Keep Britain Tidy, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Keep Wales Tidy, and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful – with the first ‘Green Flag’ awarded to a school in Northern Ireland in 1994.⁴²

More recent climate change education initiatives include: the teaching training programme [eduCCate Global](#); a climate-crisis curriculum developed by ThoughtBox Education that combines critical thinking, system thinking and empathy-building; and a campaign for schools to make a ‘[Let’s Go Zero](#)’ on carbon emissions by 2030 pledge, led by Ashden and Global Action Plan.

Teach the Future

In 2019, the UK Student Climate Network and Students Organising for Sustainability launched the [Teach the Future](#) campaign calling for education reform in the UK to respond to the climate crisis. Based on research that found 68% of students want to learn more about climate change and 75% of teachers feel they do not have adequate training to teach the subject, these young activists have proposed an English Climate Emergency Education Act.⁴³

Educating for empowerment and hope

Climate change education is an emerging field of both practice and research. A 2019 study on the impact of climate change education, led by the University of Florida researcher Martha Monroe, found that it is most effective when it focuses on personally relevant and meaningful information, and uses active and engaging teaching methods.⁴⁴ Other teaching strategies identified by the review include:

- Engaging in deliberative discussions
- Interacting with scientists
- Addressing misconceptions
- Implementing school or community projects.⁴⁵

Another 2019 review of climate education literature, by David Rousell at Manchester Metropolitan University and the Australian researcher Amy Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, found that knowledge-based approaches to studying climate

science were insufficient, and advocated engaging learners in the emotional dimensions of climate change as a better way of empowering them to become agents of change.⁴⁶

An emerging theme in climate education research is the importance of hope for counteracting climate anxiety and fatalism, with a distinction made between ‘constructive hope’ and ‘passive optimism’ – the latter of which can have negative consequences, with optimistic people being less likely to take action in order to address environmental issues.⁴⁷

Schools have a critical role to play in addressing climate change – from the carbon footprint of their operations to the classroom teaching that prepares young people for the future. Keri Facer, a Professor of Educational and Social Futures at the University of Bristol, has articulated a new responsibility for the education system to embrace, as the climate crisis unfolds – especially in terms of adaptation that relates to both physical climate resilience and a cultural shift in how we think about environmental issues. Professor Facer writes:

*The unanswered question is whether schools will be liberated as a powerful social resource to facilitate a civilisation shift or whether industrial models of education, too closely allied to the institutions and beliefs of neoliberal modernity, will respond with business as usual.*⁴⁸

5

Climate careers

As outlined by the UK's recent ten-point plan for a 'green industrial revolution', fighting climate change can be framed as an opportunity to create new jobs and pursue economic growth. Business concern for environmental issues has evolved out of more general calls for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which has been defined as the economic, legal and ethical responsibilities of the private sector.⁴⁹ From Victorian philanthropy to modern shareholder activism, CSR involves businesses minimising harm and actively working to solve social problems, within their workforce, in their surrounding communities and throughout their supply chains.

In 1968, the Italian industrialist Aurelio Peccei and the Scottish scientist Alexander King convened a group of economists and scientists – in what became known as the Club of Rome – to explore the unsustainable direction of global capitalism. In their ground-breaking report [*The Limits to Growth*](#), published in 1972, early computer models were used to explore the trends of accelerating industrialisation, rapid population growth, widespread malnutrition, depletion of non-renewable resources, and a deteriorating environment. On page 23 of their report, the authors stated:

If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years. The most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity.⁵⁰

New economics

In the 1990s, many multinational corporations began to tackle 'eco-efficiency' as an opportunity to align business and social objectives. By reducing waste and avoiding pollution, they

could also cut costs and reduce risks.⁵¹ This became known as the ‘triple bottom line’ of social, environmental and economic impacts. However, in recently revisiting the phrase he coined, the entrepreneur John Elkington argued that the triple bottom line was not intended merely as an accounting system, to boost profitability, but rather as a tool for disruption – ‘a genetic code, a triple helix of change for tomorrow’s capitalism’.⁵²

Several new economic concepts are critical to understanding the opportunity of green growth and market-based solutions to the climate crisis. The economist Kate Rayworth has developed a theory of ‘doughnut economics’, to illustrate a world economy operating within both social and planetary limits.⁵³ In this model, the doughnut is composed of two concentric circles: the outer circle captures the planetary boundaries beyond which we will overshoot ecological stability and resilience; while the inner circle reflects the basic needs of humanity, or sufficiency, as articulated by the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Whilst setting a world record for the fastest solo circumnavigation of the globe, in 2004–2005, Dame Ellen MacArthur had an epiphany about finite resources, and on her return to the UK, became an advocate for the ‘circular economy’.⁵⁴ Building on previous thinking about natural capital and industrial ecology, the circular economy elevates environmentalism’s ‘three Rs’ – reduce, reuse, recycle – to completely design out waste and pollution.⁵⁵

Another criticism of the focus on economic growth and the failure of metrics like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – which measures the market value of all the goods and services that a country produces – has been levelled by the economist Mariana Mazzucato, who argues that modern capitalism must shift from extracting value to creating value, and in the process revisit our very definition of value.⁵⁶

The greening of business has entered the mainstream, with conversations about climate change dominating the [World Economic Forum](#) in Davos, Switzerland,⁵⁷ many recognisable

brands like Ben & Jerry's ice-cream and the Guardian Media Group choosing to pursue certification as a purpose-driven B Corporation, and the former Bank of England governor Mark Carney concluding the 2020 Reith Lectures with a call to harness the power of markets to respond to the climate crisis.⁵⁸

Future careers

An economy that operates within limits will require new forms of investment, leadership and entrepreneurship, and a workforce with a range of new skills. The International Labour Organization's [Decent Jobs for Youth](#) programme has projected that greening the economy could result in 60 million new jobs by 2030.⁵⁹ Whilst recognising the opportunities that sustainable transitions in energy and could bring, this initiative emphasises the fact that 'greening the economy does not automatically translate into decent jobs for young people', arguing that long-term planning and strong policies will be required if we are to ensure that we increase 'access to economic opportunities in ways that reduce inequalities and promote social well-being'.⁶⁰

What are the specific green jobs of the future that we are talking about? [IET \(The Institution of Engineering and Technology\)](#) has identified various potential jobs in science and technology, for the next generation of young workers:⁶¹

- Oceanographer
- Environmental engineer
- Forest and conservation technician
- Geoscientist
- Soil and plant scientists
- Clean car engineer
- Natural scientist
- Wave energy producers
- Wind energy workers/technicians
- Green architect/designer
- Hydrologist
- Conservation scientist
- Ocean/earth scientist.

Raleigh International: Action Not Excuses

The charity [Raleigh International](#) empowers young people as agents of change and active members of civil society. Through its Action Not Excuses campaign, it is working with around 50,000 young people to create new green jobs. This programme is helping young entrepreneurs to start eco-positive businesses and workers to adapt to changing industries.⁶²

Young people can also influence the private sector through their shopping habits. The majority of ‘Generation Z’ (which refers to young people born after 1996) prefer to buy from sustainable brands and are willing to spend more for sustainable products.⁶³ However, consumers may struggle to differentiate between actual commitments to sustainability and more superficial marketing campaigns and ‘greenwashing’.⁶⁴ In the 2019 [Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan](#), Professors Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham call for revolutionary approaches to capitalism that put the planet first:

*Many arguments against rapid and comprehensive change take place explicitly or implicitly under the banner of ‘the needs of the market’, whether this be upholding supply of clothes to growing populations, maintaining jobs for textile workers, or a general need for growth. This is plainly a distraction, as without a healthy planet all activities will cease. Earth must come first.*⁶⁵

From sustainable fashion to electric vehicles, the private sector has a role to play in addressing the climate crisis. However, without fundamental change in how businesses operate, more consumption and growth – at the expense of natural systems – will only exacerbate the problem.

6

Climate adaptation

The IPCC defines climate change adaptation as:

The process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects.⁶⁶

We have already changed the climate. While we strive to mitigate this problem, to avoid the worst possible impacts, adaptation is essential. We need to navigate the change and improve the resilience of natural systems, infrastructure and human communities to disruption. Adaptation is both place-based and context-specific, encompassing disaster preparedness, natural resource management and agriculture innovations.

Exploring maladaptation to climate change in international development, Dr Lisa Schipper from the [Environmental Change Institute](#) at the University of Oxford, considers the case of a farmer in an increasingly dry region. The farmer has a range of options:

- Ignore the trend and take no action, which will lead to increased vulnerability
- Adopt short-term ‘coping’ strategies, based on the assumption that things will eventually get back to normal – the farmer will not become more vulnerable, nor more resilient, and the status quo could be costly to maintain
- Learn and adapt, even if this involves starting with coping strategies – leading to incremental improvements in resilience and positive adaptation
- Adopt strategies, with the aim of adapting or coping, that go wrong, leading to maladaptation and increased vulnerability.⁶⁷

Adaptation in the UK

Under the [Climate Change Act 2008](#), the UK Government produces a Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) and a National Adaptation Programme (NAP) on a five-year cycle (see page 17). The 2017, the CCRA identified the following substantial risks facing human and natural systems in this country:⁶⁸

1. Flooding and coastal change risks to communities, businesses and infrastructure (*more action needed*)
2. Risks to health, well-being and productivity from high temperatures (*more action needed*)
3. Risks of shortages in the public water supply, and for agriculture, energy generation and industry – with impacts on freshwater ecology (*more action needed*)
4. Risks to natural capital, including terrestrial, coastal, marine and freshwater ecosystems, soils and biodiversity (*more action needed*)
5. Risks to domestic and international food production and trade (*more action needed*)
6. New and emerging pests and diseases, and invasive non-native species, affecting people, plants and animals (*research priority*).

In reviewing the 2018 NAP, the Climate Change Committee commended the water sector for long-term planning and the [Environment Agency](#) for an ambitious risk management strategy with respect to flooding and erosion, but warned, 'England is not prepared for even a 2°C rise in global temperature, let alone more extreme levels of warming'.⁶⁹

Anxiety and human resilience

For many people, the acceptance that we have already changed the climate and are unprepared for future climate impacts is a source of anxiety. Psychotherapist and researcher Caroline Hickman notes that this anxiety should not be seen as a

pathology, but rather as a reasonable and healthy response to the existential threat of climate change.⁷⁰ In a 2019 study of two communities that have engaged deeply with climate change – climate scientists and campaigners – Rosemary Randall and Paul Hoggett found that activists had developed communities of support to deal with the emotional toll of environmental campaigning, whilst the hyper-rational culture of science served as a defence mechanism for many researchers, but left those who expressed feelings of grief or loss professionally isolated.⁷¹

Force of Nature – with Clover Hogan

At the age of 16, Clover Hogan found herself representing young people at COP21, the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Paris. As she engaged with activists and political leaders, Clover realised that the powerlessness we feel in the face of climate change is a very real threat that could undermine the Paris Agreement. In response, she started [Force of Nature](#), a youth-led organisation that helps young people turn their climate anxiety into agency.⁷²

Arts and culture can help us to make sense of a changing world, navigate tumultuous times and build individual and collective resilience.⁷³ In December 2018, the Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson's [Ice Watch](#) installation made climate change a more visceral experience by relocating 30 icebergs from Greenland's fjords to the Tate Modern so that Londoners could physically experience them melting and reflect on the melting of glaciers due to global warming.⁷⁴

Since 2014, the Scottish artist Katie Paterson has been exploring longer-term thinking through a 100-year artwork project called [The Future Library](#), in which 1,000 trees planted in a forest outside of Oslo, Norway, will be left to grow for a century and then used to create books for a future anthology, using manuscripts submitted by guest authors each year but not published until 2114.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the writers involved in the [Dark Mountain Project](#) publish a journal featuring creative responses to the major challenges of our time:

Together, we are walking away from the stories that our societies like to tell themselves, the stories that prevent us seeing clearly the extent of the ecological, social and cultural unravelling that is now underway. We are making art that doesn't take the centrality of humans for granted. We are tracing the deep cultural roots of the mess the world is in. And we are looking for other stories, ones that can help us make sense of a time of disruption and uncertainty.⁷⁶

7

Climate action

Experts have been critical to our understanding of climate change and the crafting of potential solutions, but our future will be determined by the mobilisation of civil society to demand climate action. Over the past two decades, the social movement in response to the climate crisis has largely been shaped by young activists. Young people have taken to the streets outside UN meetings, staged creative interventions at museums and theatres to protest sponsorship from oil companies, pressured educational institutions into divesting their endowments from fossil fuels, and walked out of their schools on weekly climate strikes.

Earth Day and the Earth Summit

Young people were just as important in the origins of the environmental movement, five decades ago. The first [Earth Day](#), on 22 April 1970, was organised by the 25-year-old graduate student and activist Denis Hayes, and an estimated 20 million Americans (10% of the US population at the time) participated in protests, campus ‘teach-ins’ and community-based environmental projects, involving 10,000 schools.⁷⁷ The idea of teach-ins had emerged at universities in the mid-1960s as a hybrid model of peaceful protest, involving student sit-ins and informal lectures in opposition to the Vietnam War. Rather than going on strike, teachers and students occupied classrooms instead.⁷⁸

Two decades later, one of the most powerful voices at the [Rio Earth Summit](#) in 1992 was 12-year-old Severn Cullis-Suzuki, who told the international delegation:

*Coming up here today, I have no hidden agenda. I am fighting for my future. Losing my future is not like losing an election, or a few points on the stock market.... Do not forget why you are attending these conferences – who you’re doing this for. We are your own children. You are deciding what kind of a world we are growing up in.*⁷⁹

Civil society at the UN

In the UNFCCC COP summits that followed, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were granted ‘observer status’ to officially participate in meetings and lobby world leaders.⁸⁰ The different constituencies at these meetings are an ‘alphabet soup’ of interests: ENGO (environmental), BINGO (business), RINGO (research), YOUNGO (youth), and others.

The [Pre-COP](#) events due to take place in Italy this September include the global youth summit [Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition](#) (an online Youth4Climate series, launched in 2020), which findings from the Cumberland Lodge conference **Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives** will directly inform.

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres also recently created a [Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change](#), to help bring the voices of young people into the highest levels of climate negotiations.⁸¹

Advisors in the UN Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change:⁸²

- Nisreen Elsaïm (Sudan) @NisreenElsaim
- Ernest Gibson (Fiji) @ErnestKGibson
- Vladislav Kaim (Moldova) @VladislavKaim
- Sophia Kianni (United States) @SophiaKianni
- Nathan Metenier (France) @Nathan_Metenier
- Paloma Costa (Brazil) @pcopaloma
- Archana Soreng (India) @SorengArchana

Climate protests

The grassroots climate movement has also been influential outside of these formal roles. For example, starting in 2005, the UK charity Friends of the Earth led the successful [Big Ask](#) campaign to pressure the Government to adopt the Climate Change Act (see page 17), with almost 200,000 people contacting their MPs.⁸³ In 2008, [350.org](#) – which is the name of

the organisation, its URL, and a reference to the safe level of 350 parts per million of CO₂ in the atmosphere – was founded by the writer and activist Bill McKibben and a small group of his students at Middlebury College in Vermont, USA. As leaders of an initial wave of internet-savvy, youth-driven climate advocacy organisations, they organised distributed protests around the world, direct action at the White House, and the 400,000-strong [People's Climate March](#) outside a UN climate summit in New York, in September 2014. 350.org's digital campaigns have been described as a virtuous cycle, where online tools spur offline action – the results of which can be documented and shared online to inspire further action.⁸⁴

In October 2018, a small group of climate campaigners from a variety of backgrounds converged on the Houses of Parliament under the banner of [Extinction Rebellion](#), and in a truly grassroots groundswell of support they were joined by more than 1,000 protesters. Rallying around three demands – declare a climate emergency, commit to net-zero emissions by 2025, and hold a citizens' climate assembly – thousands of Extinction Rebellion activists blocked bridges and roads in central London (including occupying Oxford Circus with a large pink boat) for 11 days in April 2019.⁸⁵ The youth wing of this movement has played a critical role in shaping the network to be more inclusive and future-orientated, whilst also arguing against an escalation of direct action that could undermine public goodwill. For example, XR Youth opposed an action that involved illegally flying drones at Heathrow Airport to disrupt flights.⁸⁶

Fridays for Future

The school climate strikes originated in August 2018, when 15-year-old Greta Thunberg famously skipped school to protest against inaction on climate change, outside the Swedish parliament. Within little more than a year, seven million students and their supporters were joining school strikes around the world.⁸⁷ With echoes of Severn Cullis-Suzuki, Thunberg rose in

prominence and delivered scathing speeches at UN meetings and at the World Economic Forums in Davos.

Speaking at COP24 in Poland, she projected into the future:

*The year 2078 I will celebrate my 75th birthday. If I have children, maybe they will spend that day with me. Maybe they will ask me about you. Maybe they will ask why you didn't do anything while there still was time to act. You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes. Until you start focusing on what needs to be done rather than what is politically possible, there is no hope.*⁸⁸

Building on this momentum, the [UK Student Climate Network \(UKSCN\)](#) now co-ordinates the [#FridaysforFuture](#) school strikes and protests in Britain, with more than 350,000 students and adults taking part in September 2019. In terms of political action, UKSCN campaigns for the Green New Deal, Teach the Future, and electoral reform to lower the voting age to 16 and implement proportional representation.

Citizens' Climate Assembly

Another form of democratic participation on climate issues is found in citizens' assemblies. This model of engaging randomly selected people in a deliberative process of dialogue, on contentious political issues, gained prominence in Ireland over the past decade.⁸⁹ The Irish government has used citizens' assemblies twice, to bring ordinary people together to make policy recommendations that resulted in Constitutional reforms, on both gay marriage and abortion rights. In 2019, six Select Committees in the House of Commons commissioned [Climate Assembly UK](#) to bring together ordinary people to explore the question, 'How should the UK meet its target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?'⁹⁰

The 108 people who participated in Climate Assembly UK were a representative sample of the UK population, both demographically and in terms of their concern about climate

change. Guided by a number of experts, they met for six weekends in 2020. Half of these sessions were in-person and half were virtual, due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. They discussed a range of issues, including travel, home energy use and food.

The Assembly agreed upon a number of principles and gave specific recommendations to guide the UK net-zero strategy, which were presented in a report called [The Path to Net Zero](#). Some of the themes that were highlighted were: education and information, fairness, freedom and choice, co-benefits, and the restoration of nature.⁹¹

Youth Climate Summit

In November 2020, the charity [Global Action Plan](#) hosted a virtual Youth Climate Summit, involving thousands of students and teachers from around the UK. Youth Ambassadors synthesised the concerns of young people that were expressed at the summit into five main calls for action, which are quoted below:

- Set up specialist protection areas for all carbon sinks such as peatlands, forests etc., with a fund that businesses impacting these areas pay into,
- All new schools to be carbon zero, government and business to help all existing schools achieve carbon zero by 2030,
- Stop subsidising farming that harms the planet and instead subsidise good farming practices such as regenerative farming and polycultures,
- Business and government to accelerate the circular economy,
- Government and business to make good on the green recovery they keep talking about - starting now, especially with green jobs.⁹²

Figure 1: How much do you agree or disagree that each of the following policy options should be part of how the UK gets to net zero? (Climate Assembly UK, 2020):⁹³

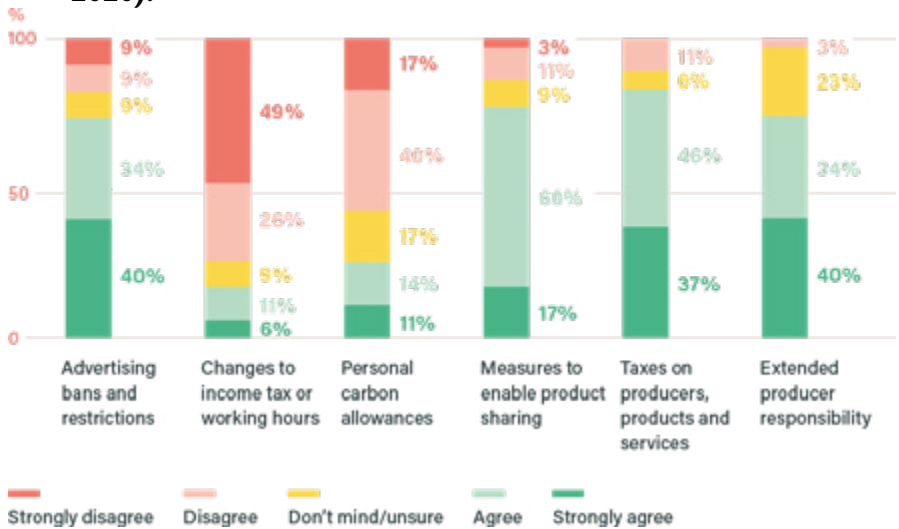


Figure 2: How much do you agree or disagree that each of the following technologies should be part of how the UK generates electricity? (Climate Assembly UK, 2020):⁹⁴

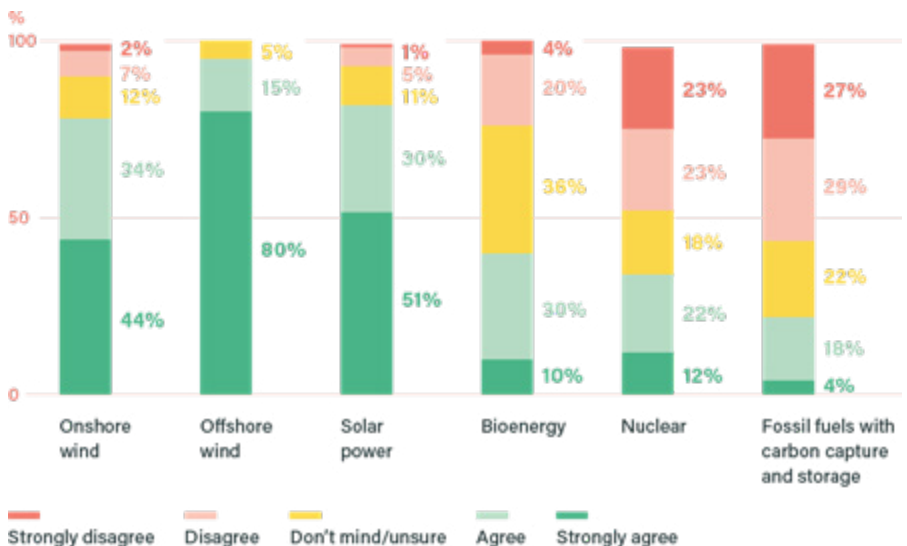
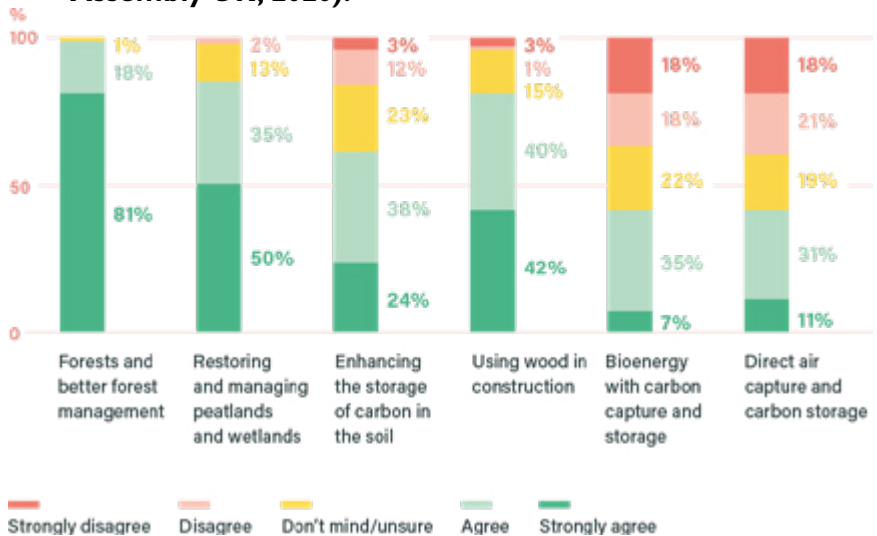


Figure 3: How much do you agree or disagree that each of the following greenhouse gas removal methods should be part of how the UK gets to net zero? (Climate Assembly UK, 2020):⁹⁵



Participation in democracy can take many forms – voting, political lobbying, citizens’ assemblies, public protests and direct action. Many young people are not yet able to vote, but they have still found creative ways to get their voices heard by politicians – including going on strike from school. Traditionally, civil society representatives have played an important role at the UNFCCC COPs, both as formal observers inside the halls of power and as ‘rabble rousers’ in the streets outside. In Glasgow, a significant mobilisation by a cross-section of society might remind political and business leaders of the public appetite for ambitious climate action. However, ongoing concerns about COVID-19 may serve to limit public access and stifle the voices of those who would call for change.⁹⁶

8

Conclusion to Part I

Future scenarios have played an important role in the development of climate science and the negotiation of climate policy. From *The Limits to Growth* to IPCC reports, models allow us to analyse trends in emissions, climate, and natural and social impacts.⁹⁷ Climate scenarios also influence how we think about the future – offering visions of both new green paradigms, on the one hand, and the collapse of civilisation on the other. They can help to crystallise our hopes and fears, and motivate political action.⁹⁸

Perhaps climate change is best understood as a ‘wicked problem’ – a complex socio-technical issue, with no simple or clear solution.⁹⁹ This means our response must be multifaceted and cut across government policy, corporate responsibility, individual choices and social transformations.

Former US President Barack Obama captured our small window of opportunity to address the climate crisis in a speech before the UN, in 2014: ‘We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it’.¹⁰⁰

‘We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it’.

2.

Youth priorities for action



TOGETHER
FOR OUR
PLANET



#ALL4
CLIMATE
ITALY
2021



9

Introduction to Part II

Part I above provides an independent review of current research into our rapidly changing climate, and the action being taken to address the associated risks and opportunities. This formed the basis for **Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives**, a virtual Cumberland Lodge conference held over the course a fortnight in March 2021, to give young people a platform to express their climate ideas, visions and expectations ahead of the international [PreCOP26](#) Youth4Climate summit in Milan and [COP26](#), the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference taking place in Glasgow in November 2021.

Young people of different genders, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds – from schools, colleges, universities and youth organisations across the UK and around the world – met online with civil servants, charity representatives, activists, community practitioners and academics. Together, they explored different perspectives and exchanged views on their priorities for climate futures. During the conference, delegates had the chance to hear from a raft of high-profile speakers, to take part in live polls and question-and-answer sessions, and to join intergenerational breakout-room discussions.

Cumberland Lodge partnered with a variety of organisations to attract participants to the conference, including the British Youth Council, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, the Great Ormond Street Hospital Youth Board, Raleigh International, the UK Schools Sustainability Network, and Youth Link Scotland. One-third of the conference participants were under 25 years old, and the recommendations we present at the end of this report are chiefly guided by their ideas and contributions.

Part II of this report summaries the main messages arising from the presentations, discussions and interactive polls at this virtual conference, and presents a statement from the young people who took part, with their priorities for climate action.

As Cumberland Lodge discussions typically operate under the [Chatham House Rule](#), the contributions of individual participants have not been directly attributed. There are two exceptions, however: the key messages of guest presenters who opened each interactive discussion session; and some of the quotes from young people, gathered through a post-conference survey, for which permissions have been sought separately.

The recommendations that follow have been further shaped by a consultation convened online in June 2021, involving conference representatives and further young people and specialists in the field. Participants in this smaller event were tasked with reviewing and refining our draft report. The resulting statement of priorities reflects both young people's perspectives on climate futures and their demands for action that needs to start now.

While online conferences offer a very different experience to an in-person event at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park, participants were actively engaged in the four sessions hosted on Zoom. The conference culminated with a clear call to action from young people, for the international delegations and other key climate stakeholders involved in the upcoming UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) summits.

Ready to work together

During this project, it became abundantly clear that young people are anxious, frustrated and tired of waiting for governments and politicians to act, and they are also engaged and ready to work in partnership with leaders from all sectors, to shape a better future.

As we begin to see the 'light at the end of the tunnel' with the COVID-19 pandemic, and emerge to face the climate emergency head-on, we urge you to take these recommendations seriously, and to take personal and collective responsibility for ensuring they are fully reflected in actions and commitments leading up to COP26, and beyond.

10

Exploring climate futures

Over the course of four online sessions, conference participants were introduced to a number of ideas relating to climate futures, in respect of education, business, adaptation and activism. Guest speakers were invited to frame each of these issues around climate change, young people and the future, and each panel inspired provocative, intergenerational discussions amongst participants. Sessions also included interactive polls to ‘take the pulse’ of the intergenerational group, on different themes, the results of which are captured in graphs on the pages that follow.

‘My vision is bright, for I hope that one day we will be free of climate anxiety. However, right now, we cannot be free because there is much to do – big and small – and hence we are all called to action.

‘This call to action is now: we have to stop pushing aside climate change and confront it. This means we change legislation and we take individual action in our everyday lives, towards a healthier planet. Then and only then might our actions lead to a future in which our planet is safe and healthy, because we as stewards of the planet have done everything within our power to protect our precious planet and encourage a healthy and prosperous future for it.’

Yelena, 18, Surrey

Education for sustainability

[Professor Justin Dillon](#) started the first session by providing an overview of environmental and sustainability education in the UK. Dillon is a former science teacher, the Director of the Centre for Research in STEM Education at the University of Exeter, and President of the National Association for Environmental Education. He critiqued the national curriculum of England for not reflecting the urgency of the climate crisis and for

failing to effectively prepare young people for the future. Dillon called for:

- Responsibility for the national curriculum to be transferred to an independent body, free from political control
- A total rethink of the curriculum and the purpose of schooling, to make the values of people and planet central
- The development of trustworthy sources of online information on climate change and sustainability, as well as improved online literacy so that both teachers and students can identify reliable sources.

[Meg Baker](#) shifted the conversation to higher education by sharing the research and programmes of Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS-UK), which grew out of the sustainability programmes of the National Union of Students (NUS). SOS-UK, where Baker is Director of Education, has been surveying university students for the past decade, and it has found that over 90% of students think their place of study should be actively incorporating and promoting sustainable development.¹⁰¹ SOS-UK has also partnered with the UK Student Climate Network to develop the campaign Teach the Future, which is calling for curriculum reform and school sustainability across the education sectors of England, Scotland and Wales. Baker's final point was that addressing the climate emergency requires a focus on fairness and justice – which we need in order to both decolonise and decarbonise our education systems.

[Rev Lennox Yearwood Jr](#) continued with the theme of intersectional environmental education, reflecting on the origins of Hip Hop Caucus, the US-based charity that promotes political activism for young people through hip-hop music and culture, where he is President and Chief Executive. This charity's ethos revolves around three core values: no war, no warming, and no white supremacy. Yearwood emphasised the importance of environmental education outside of the classroom, and harnessing 'genius outside the academy' (meaning intellectual

exchange and creative expression that has its roots outside of academia).

Yearwood called on people to utilise the power of popular culture – music, film, and even comedy – to reach, engage and educate new audiences, and create a larger, more inclusive environmental movement. He concluded by saying:

To create the change that we have to have, we must now connect the dots; we must break down the silos, we must broaden the movement, we must use culture, and we must come together as humans, because humanity is on the line. Young people right now understand this more than ever. They understand that many of us fought for equality in the 20th century, and, while we're definitely still fighting for equality, we are now fighting for existence in the 21st century.

The open discussion in this session explored why universities are failing to prioritise sustainability. Is it because they are chiefly ranked on metrics such as research output, international reach, graduate salaries and career progression? Should greater emphasis be placed on their sustainability policies and environmental education provision, as reflected in the [People & Planet league table](#), which was established by a student group in 2007? Should their contributions to environmental education, across all academic disciplines, be subject to closer scrutiny?

Participants also asked about the leverage points for changing the UK's education system, and panellists commented on: the need to incorporate climate futures into teacher training, freeing curriculum development from political control, and voting for political parties with the strongest commitments to climate education. In smaller groups, participants discussed best practice in education for sustainability, and some common themes included: greater use of outdoor learning and a stronger focus on connection to place, transdisciplinary learning that incorporates creativity and innovation, and embedding the UN Sustainable Development Goals across all subject areas (not just science and geography).

Participants took part in two live polls during this opening session, via the Slido mobile app (see graphs below).

Figure 4: Where has the majority of your knowledge on climate issues come from?

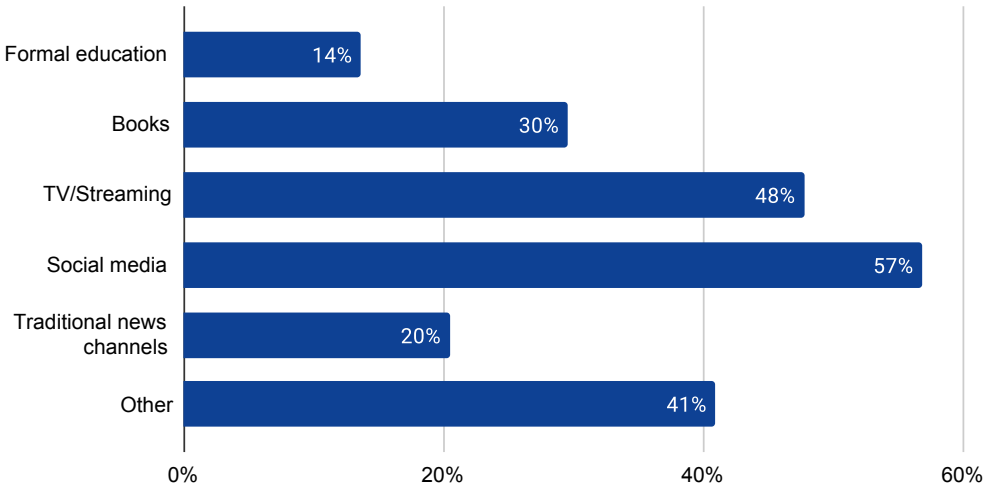
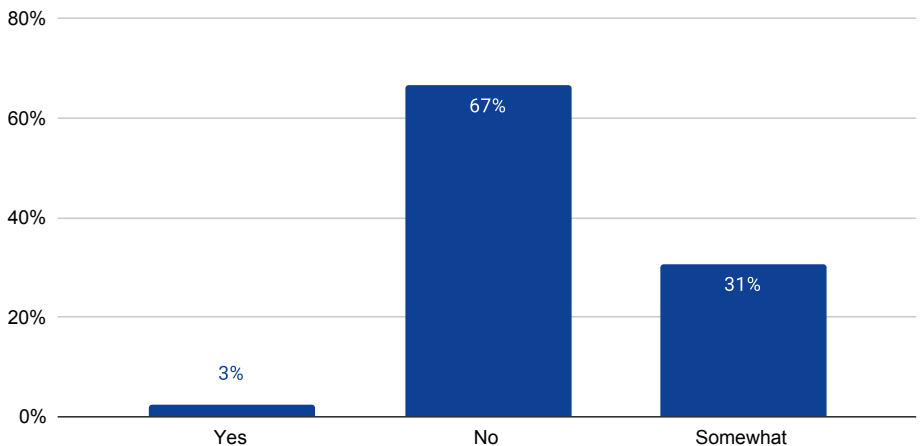


Figure 5: Do you think your formal education has equipped you with the skills and knowledge to live sustainably?



Green business and careers

Session two of the virtual conference kicked off with [Louise Quarrell](#), Chief Operating Officer at the sustainability consultancy Avieco. She described a sea-change in green business practice over the past 15 years, with public awareness, government policy and investor pressure particularly converging in 2019. Quarrell was optimistic about the future of the green economy, especially given how quickly the business community has pivoted during the COVID-19 pandemic, proving that rapid transitions are possible. She encouraged everyone to use their power – as consumers and investors – to engage with businesses and keep them moving in the right direction, as quickly as possible.

[Louise Stevens](#) shared her experiences of working at Innocent Drinks, where she served as both Head of Logistics and Head of Sustainability. Innocent is a purpose-led [B Corporation](#), which refers to a rapidly growing certification programme that encourages organisations to consider the impact of their activities on a range of stakeholders and on the planet as a whole. Stevens crafted Innocent's sustainability strategy, which sets the company on a course for net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, as well as sourcing all of its ingredients sustainably whilst supporting the livelihoods of farmers, and advocating for recycling by engaging with its customers and across the drinks industry to promote the circular economy.

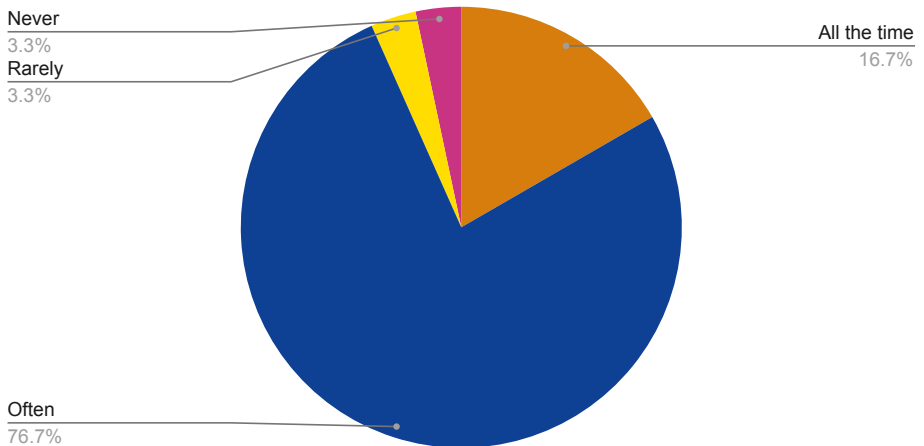
[Jouja Maamri](#), a UK Delegate to the G7 Youth Summit, who works in impact investing, shared her personal journey as a young person discovering green careers, which prioritise roles that contribute to climate solutions. She referenced a recent report by Friends of the Earth that calls for the Government to invest in green jobs by creating 250,000 green apprenticeships in the UK.¹⁰² Maamri also encouraged everyone to investigate the environmental impact of their savings, pensions and investments, to ensure that even small amounts of money are doing good for people and the planet. She argued that we all have a part to play in the move towards sustainable finance.

The group discussion in this session explored some practical concerns for young people, such as:

- Should I study Geography if I want to pursue a green career?
- Where can I find out how ethical my bank is?
- Do food products label air miles, and should they?

The panellists also explored nuances between green economic growth and degrowth, and how to spot potential 'greenwashing', which is when businesses trumpet superficial green initiatives whilst continuing with environmentally destructive activities. Each breakout group took on the challenge of 'greening' the operations of a different type of business and took part in a live poll (see graph below).

Figure 6: How often do environmental considerations affect which businesses you buy from?



'Any action that you can take is going to make a change. And so, whether that's really getting involved in campaigns and protests, or even if it's just posting on social media, or it's making sure you're aware of what you're buying in shops – actually, it all makes a difference. And so, whether you're in school, or you're out of school, or maybe you're in some sort of youth club or organisation, there will be something that you can do in that role.'

Rebecca, 22, London

Adaptation and eco-anxiety

The third conference session explored adaptation to climate change, both at the collective and individual level. [Dr Lisa Schipper](#), a researcher at the University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute, described mitigation and adaptation as 'two sides of the climate policy coin'. The more we mitigate, or reduce the drivers of climate change, the less we need to adapt to change. Conversely, the longer we take to address the problem of greenhouse gas emissions and the less we do to reduce them, the more we will need to adapt, which will be costly, both in terms of infrastructure and livelihoods.

Schipper warned of maladaptation – where well-intentioned adaptation programmes backfire and increase vulnerability – and she argued for combining adaptation with climate justice to prevent what Archbishop Desmond Tutu has called 'adaptation apartheid'.¹⁰³

The environmental psychologist [Professor Lorraine Whitmarsh](#) shifted the conversation about adaptation and anxiety to our understanding of human behaviour. As Director of the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations at the University of Bath, she has been studying public attitudes towards climate change in the UK, with recent surveys showing high levels of concern and support for urgent action, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁴

Whitmarsh emphasised that taking climate action – active travel (e.g., cycling and walking more, instead of driving), eating plant-based diets, and spending more time in nature – results in personal benefits, especially in terms of health and wellbeing. She challenged the myth that consumption leads to happiness, pointing out that our psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness can be better met through living more sustainably.

Reflecting on recent survey results, Whitmarsh indicated that levels of climate anxiety are relatively low in the UK, compared to some parts of the world (perhaps because we are less overtly affected by the impacts of climate change, so far), but she noted that people under 30 years old are more likely to be anxious about climate futures than those in older age-groups.

[Rhinal Patel](#) continued on the theme of personal adaptation and anxiety, and led a practical mindfulness exercise, designed to ground participants in their breath. Patel has found that time spent in silence and nature can be an antidote to climate anxiety and help to build the personal resilience that enables more courageous action. Her overall message was one of love:

When we feel deep love, we feel empowered to rise to the challenges of today. And not just for ourselves – our deeper, inner strength comes from standing up for those who are most vulnerable and suffering[...] Although you may see anxiety as a curse, I have also found that this is a gift. When that energy is transmuted into love, it is like a superpower.

Adaptation begins with acknowledging that we live in times of uncertainty and rapid planetary change and we need to build our resilience to face that change head-on, both in terms of the personal emotional strength that comes from mindfulness and the community resilience afforded by appropriate infrastructure and institutions. In this session, guest speakers discussed the risks of climate-related anxiety leading to panic or apathy, versus its potential to motivate positive action. The group discussion explored the relationships between eco-anxiety, individual behaviour change and systems change.

Participants also answered a series of poll questions about their environmental attitudes and behaviour (see Figures 7–11, below), and these were further discussed in virtual breakout rooms.

'I think it's really important that we don't place the whole burden of the climate crisis on young people. I think everybody in society has got a responsibility, and everybody in society has a part to play. But I think young people really do have a massively important role in raising their voice and driving change within their families, within their schools, within their colleges.'

Harry, 20, Middlesbrough

Figure 7: Perspectives on climate challenges and adaptation

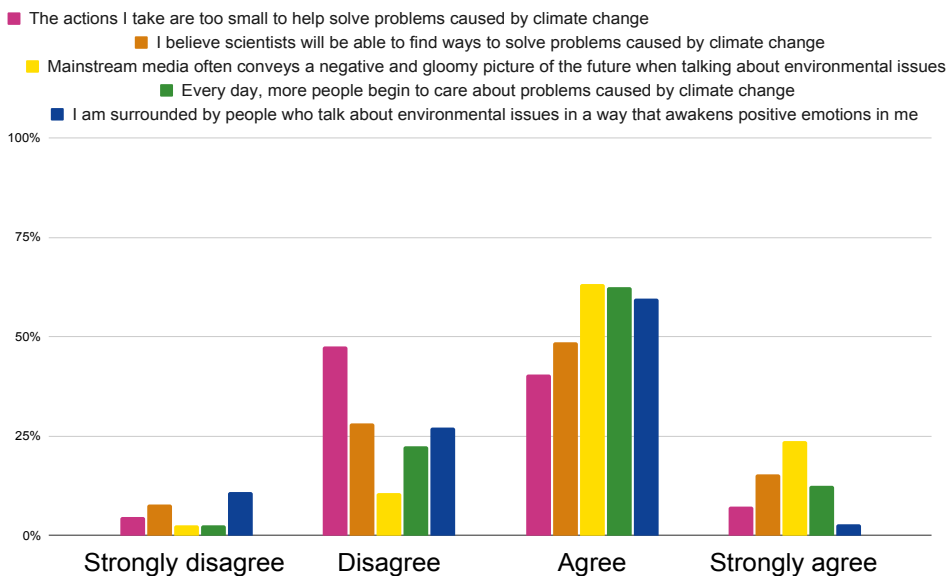


Figure 8: Perspectives on eco-anxiety

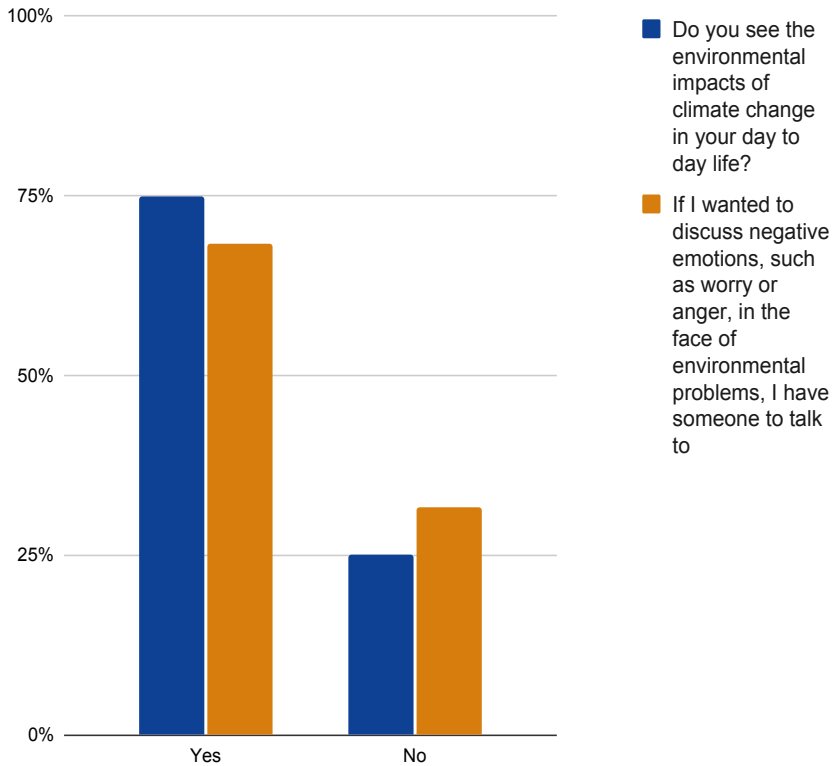


Figure 9: Impacts that climate change is having on the daily lives of our conference participants

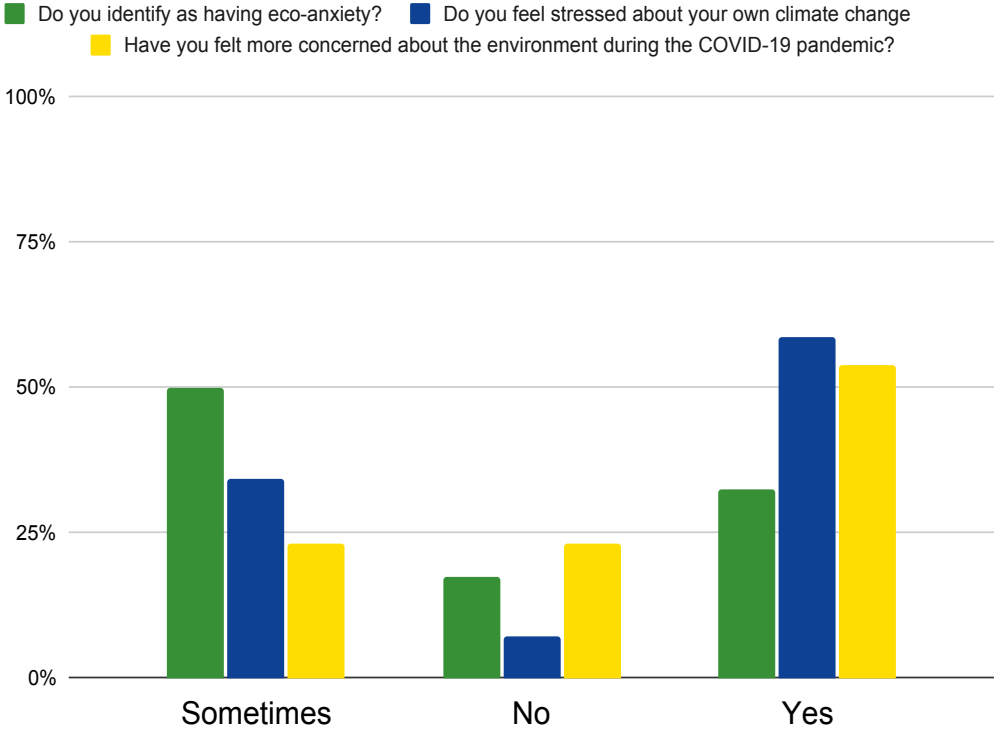


Figure 10: In what areas are you willing to make sacrifices for the good of the planet?

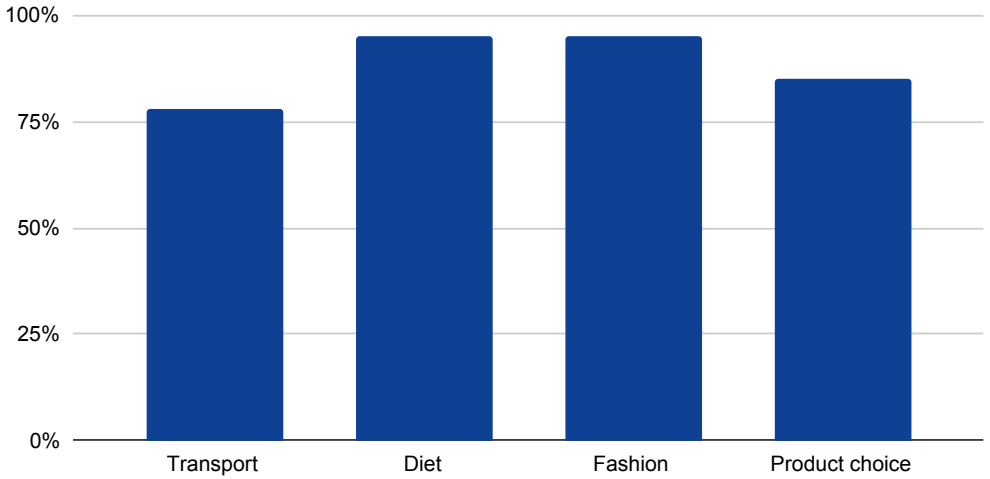
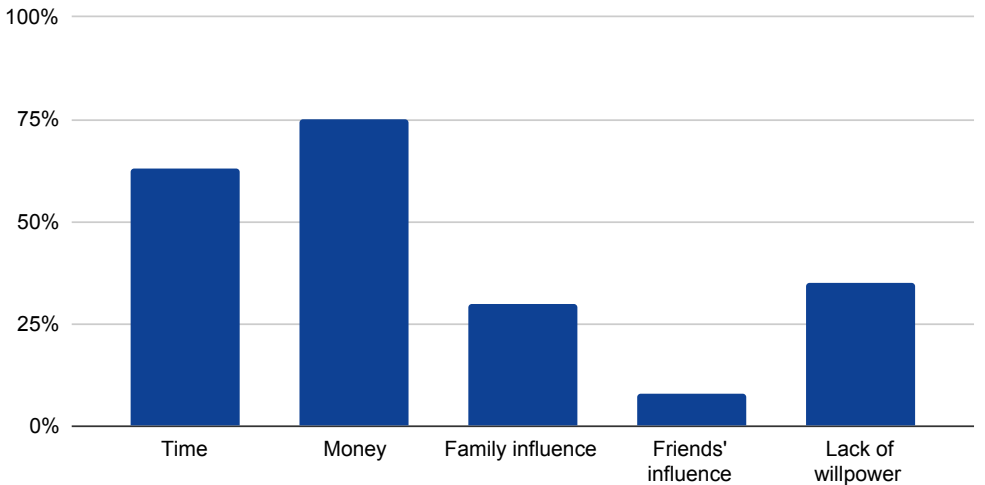


Figure 11: What factors are preventing you from doing more to protect the planet?



Democracy and activism

The final session of the conference was opened by [Camilla Born](#), Deputy Director of Strategy for COP26 at the UK Cabinet Office. As a youth climate activist, Born was involved in both the UK Youth Climate Coalition and the Youth Constituency of the UNFCCC (YOUNGO). She offered three pieces of advice to young people preparing to participate in the UNFCCC climate meetings in Glasgow:

- Spend time building strong working relationships with climate officials
- You have the most power and leverage where you have ‘skin in the game’, for example on ‘Action for Climate Empowerment’ (the UNFCCC term for work under Article 6 of the Climate Convention, and Article 12 of the Paris Agreement, which covers climate education)
- Focus on what you can realistically ‘get over the line’ during the two weeks of the COP26 summit, and act early to shape what is possible.

[William Eccles](#) shared information about [The Commitment](#), a campaign for voters to pledge to vote for candidates who prioritise climate action and biodiversity conservation. The goal of this initiative is to send a clear message to politicians that climate and the natural world should be higher up on their political agendas. The Commitment is also a platform for voters to share personal messages about why the environment is a voting priority for them. Eccles referenced the recent publication *Britain Talks Climate* by Climate Outreach, which identified seven segments of the electorate, based on different political motivations. He shared data on the percentage of each segment that prioritises climate policy considerations when voting, to inform our ensuing discussions.¹⁰⁵

The final speaker was [Katie Hodgetts](#), a campaigner for the UK Youth Climate Coalition and founder of the Resilience Project, which supports young activists as they navigate eco-anxiety

and burnout. Hodgetts emphasised that activism has a tangible impact, referencing the anti-fracking campaigns that resulted in a Government ban on the controversial extraction of shale gas. She also invited young people to participate in all forms of activism, with no specific skills, knowledge or personality types required. 'The only prerequisite you need to be a youth activist is that you exist, now, on a burning and unjust planet.'

The following discussion explored what it is that motivates politicians. The key message was: if you want to influence a politician, use your vote to do so. Panellists also reflected on their informal conversations with Government ministers, in which ministers have been quick to appreciate the connection between environmental concerns and making sure that their children have a positive future.

In breakout groups, participants explored specific demands to put to climate officials and world leaders at COP26, with the final plenary resulting in the recommendations outlined below. Participants' draft recommendations were reviewed and critiqued by conference participants and further climate change experts and activists, at the virtual consultation convened by Cumberland Lodge in June 2021.

'I hope to see a green recovery from COVID-19, in a world where we have learnt from the positive lessons of the pandemic. Above and beyond that, I would hope to see a sustainable future that incorporates equality for all.'

Ava, 23, Glasgow



Conference statement and recommendations

We, the young people gathered at the Cumberland Lodge virtual conference **Climate Futures: Youth Perspectives**, offer the following recommendations to the international delegations and other stakeholders preparing for the UNFCCC COP26 summit in Glasgow.

Work with us: we are your partners, and only by working together can we make a better future possible.

We urge you to urgently implement the following initiatives and democratic reforms, to safeguard our interests and involve us more meaningfully in decision-making that affects our futures.

1. As an outcome of COP26, create a Youth Climate Parliament to facilitate international and intergenerational dialogue on climate solutions and resilience, over the next decade.

Young people have been participating in UNFCCC events from the beginning, but we have been sidelined for too long. Over the past few years, a new youth climate movement has emerged and it is time for you to listen to our voices and join us as partners.

2. Lower the voting age to 16 years old, in line with the Scottish model.

Youth action is moving from the street to the ballot box. We are climate-focused voters and we will determine the outcome of future elections. Your political careers, and the future of your political parties, depend on us.

We are working to increase our influence on the political process in our respective nations, and, collectively, we call for the rapid adoption of electoral reform.

3. Conduct citizens' assemblies on climate action.

We urge you to build on the successful use of citizens' assemblies to address politically divisive issues in Ireland.

Youth voice is essential at COP26 and beyond. Each delegation should have formal youth representation. Young people should be consulted on the climate policy decisions that will have a greater impact on our generation than on older generations. We are ready to shape a better future, but this does not abdicate you of your responsibility to do everything you can, now, to make the Paris Agreement a success.

4. Protect the interests of future generations with legislation that requires public bodies to adequately consider the long-term impacts of their decision-making.

We urge governments to follow the example of the Welsh Well-being of Future Generations Act.

What is your top demand to world leaders when it comes to climate action?

'To act with the appropriate level of urgency to put in place the measures that are needed to limit the damage caused by climate change.'

What is your vision for a more climate resilient future?

'Politicians and global leaders listening to the voices of the youth and supporting climate-led politics.'

Katie, 16, Scotland

We want more than commitments; we demand accountability.

Ahead of COP26, governments have renewed their commitment to the Paris Agreement and are ratcheting up the ambition of their nationally determined contributions. The UK's sixth

Carbon Budget aims for a 78% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2035, compared to 1990 levels. While we applaud these developments, we cannot accept empty promises.

5. Ensure that international agreements and national commitments are backed by legally binding, fully funded climate policies, with clear penalties set out for any failure to meet emissions reduction targets.

6. Allocate 5% of GDP to addressing the climate crisis.

Governments must commit the same level of spending to climate solutions that we have seen in response to the 2007–08 financial crisis and the 2020–21 COVID-19 pandemic. A 5% allocation of GDP is reflected in ambitious Green New Deal policies,¹⁰⁶ and will help ensure a habitable planet for future generations.

7. Require finance ministers to report annually on climate spending across all departments, to ensure greater transparency.

8. All parties to the Paris Agreement must immediately align and expedite domestic policy in response to the climate emergency, bringing the same energy and urgency to safeguarding our collective future that we see during a financial crash, pandemic or natural disaster.

We are told that crafting and enacting government policy takes time, but we do not have time to wait for the wheels of bureaucracy and partisan politics to turn. Every country has different contexts, cultures and systems to navigate, but we must all increase our ambition and act with purpose.

The UK has accepted the recommendations of the Climate Change Committee and adopted the sixth Carbon Budget, setting its ambitious 2050 emissions reduction target in law. However, the months between the Cumberland Lodge conference and the publication of this report only reflect missed opportunities. The Queen's Speech in May 2021 outlined the Government's policy for the year ahead, highlighting 30 laws

that ministers intend to pass in the coming year but including only a passing reference to climate change. In addition, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's 2021 Budget, presented in March 2021, included no significant new climate investments, while the Government abruptly ended a scheme for home insulation and low-carbon heating, and scaled back planned incentives for electric vehicles.

The Climate Change Committee's 2021 progress report to Parliament summarised this situation: 'The UK's record to date is strong in parts, but it has fallen behind on adapting to the changing climate and has not yet provided a coherent plan to reduce emissions in the critical decade ahead.'¹⁰⁷

Without ambitious policies, substantial investments and alignment across government agencies, your pledges to 'build back better' and meet net-zero commitments ring hollow.

Climate policy must be integrated with social and economic policy, and funded by the actors who have benefited the most from environmental degradation.

Young people intuitively understand the intersection between the climate crisis and social justice issues. Climate policies will only succeed if they incorporate commitments to equity and justice.

The UNFCCC acknowledges the common but differentiated responsibilities of richer versus poorer nations, as well as the geographically uneven loss and damage resulting from climate change. Now you must go a step further and face up to the growing inequalities and short-term thinking of global capitalism that have allowed a small number of corporations and people to amass great wealth and power at the expense of future generations.

What is your vision for a climate-resilient future?

‘Where everyone understands that we have a deep responsibility for the health of our planet and to one another, that investing and caring about a greener world is better for us all, physically, mentally and spiritually – understanding that a sustainable world is also kinder to our communities, through better jobs for all, cleaner air for our children, less materialism and stronger health.’

Fahmida, 25, London

9. Ensure that carbon taxes are targeted at the wealthiest in society.

When crafting domestic climate policies, and deciding how to pay for them, please consider who has benefited the most from the drivers of climate change. The richest 10% of the world’s population contributed over half of global greenhouse gas emissions between 1990 and 2015, while the poorest 50% were responsible for only 7%.¹⁰⁸

We believe that carbon taxes targeted at wealth and high incomes are fair, since the wealthy are more responsible for the climate crisis, due in large part to luxury consumption and energy-intensive travel.

10. Require fossil fuel companies to fund carbon capture and storage initiatives.

Companies are continuing to profit from putting greenhouse gases into our atmosphere. It is only fair that the businesses behind these emissions should now fund the measures required to mitigate their harmful activities.¹⁰⁹

II. Ensure that the process of decarbonising our economy is fair and that the basic needs of humanity are met sustainably.

This just transition should provide economic opportunities for the world’s traditionally marginalised groups, and for communities that will be disproportionately impacted by the

transition away from fossil fuels, whilst protecting communities that are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis.

Education is failing to prepare us for the future and must be reformed.

The world has changed, but our educational systems have not. Education must prepare us for a world that is affected by climate change, and create pathways to green careers and ways of life.

12. Legislate for education reform that incorporates sustainability and climate change across the formal curriculum.

Effective climate education crosses traditional disciplines and recognises the emotional dimension of the climate crisis, addressing climate anxiety empowering youth agency.

To help facilitate this reform, all parties of the Paris Agreement must take more concrete steps with regard to Article 12, including the introduction of new environmental education legislation and funding.

In line with the principles set out in Article 12, we fully endorse the Teach the Future campaign goals as a basis for taking this forward:

- Teach students about climate change
- Include green skills in many vocational courses
- Make educational buildings climate-friendly.¹¹⁰

13. Support the progression of The Education (Environment and Sustainable Citizenship) Bill through Parliament, ahead of hosting COP26.

In September 2020, a report by the UK Climate Assembly recommended that climate change should be made a compulsory subject in all schools. The Education (Environment and Sustainable Citizenship) Bill has since been introduced in the

House of Lords, as a private members' bill sponsored by Lord Knight of Weymouth. We urge the Government to support this Bill, as an example to the world of action being taken to reform environmental education.

'Every sector and every segment of our economy can, should and needs to be green. So, if we are going to restructure our entire economy, why don't we restructure it so that it can help people?'

James, 17, Scotland

Governments must actively support green businesses and invest in green jobs.

As individuals, we are committed to making environmentally responsible decisions when it comes to diet, fashion and other consumer choices. As we enter the workforce, we are looking for job opportunities and career paths that align with our values.

14. Invest in Government-funded green apprenticeships.

As a pathway to green jobs, and an opportunity for upskilling and reskilling workers in sectors that are undergoing transitions or those who have lost work due to the COVID-19 pandemic,¹¹¹ we call for urgent investment in Government-funded green apprenticeships. This will help to ensure that we have a workforce that is ready and committed to driving forward sustainable business practice, across all sectors, and that young people can pursue green careers with confidence.

15. Encourage organisations to pursue B-Corp certification, to guide the rapid adoption of more sustainable business practice.

We call on the Government to endorse B-Corp certification, and for businesses to lead the way by pursuing certification and sharing their experiences of sustainable growth and development with others in their industries.

Treat fossil fuels like the threat to our future that they are.

The burning of fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – is the primary cause of climate change. Whilst a transition is underway from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy, and the price of renewables continues to fall as new solutions for energy storage and transmission emerge, we cannot wait any longer.

16. Adopt a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty, to send a clear message to the energy industry and investors that the era of fossil fuel extraction is over.

Fossil fuels are weapons of mass destruction that are destroying our future. Every new coal mine and coal-fired power plant undermines the Paris Agreement. While we still need to use oil and gas as bridge fuels for heating and transport, that bridge ends this decade. We welcome the end of fossil fuels.

Net-zero carbon solutions must result in biodiversity net-gain.

We face twin ecological crises: climate change and biodiversity loss. We must ensure that any solutions to the climate crisis do not exacerbate the biodiversity crisis, and that climate solutions result in biodiversity net-gains. One of the core campaigns of the UK Presidency of COP26 centres on nature, and there is growing interest in nature-based solutions to climate change.

17. We call for all parties to the Paris Agreement to review their NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) for tackling the climate crisis in light of the impact of climate policies on biodiversity.

All national climate plans for achieving stated NDCs must now be linked up with governments' commitments to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

A review of the full life-cycle of technology used to generate renewable energy and electrify heat and transport, from mining

to disposal, is urgently required, to ensure that we are doing all we can to protect ecosystems and biodiversity.

Call to action

We urge you to think about the legacy you want to leave for future generations: this is a decade of consequence, and what happens in Glasgow will resonate around the world, but whilst COP26 is a milestone, what matters the most is what we all do next.

As young people, we urge you to think about the legacy you want to leave for future generations. We are looking ahead to the future with both worry and curiosity. We seek the resilience – in ourselves and our communities – to adapt to a changing world.

We are excited about the opportunity to work with older generations to craft a better future; to bring long-term thinking and creativity to the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and social equity.

We never asked to be youth climate activists, and we should not need to be, but we will be paying attention to everything you agree to and will collectively hold you accountable for your climate commitments.

How do you want to be remembered?

At some point you will pass the torch to us, and we will continue this work and tell your story to future generations. But we need your help now.

Act with courage in 2021 and your children and grandchildren will thank you.

'A climate resilient future is one that brings climate justice into the centre of society and social policy, allowing for equality and equity in our shift towards a green economy and lifestyle – making it accessible for everyone.

'Each of us has a unique experience of the effects of climate change as well as the wisdom to create new ways of tackling climate change, wherever we find ourselves in society. And so, a climate resilient future is one in which the climate is a central topic of conversation and in which each voice is heard and valued in order to overcome the issues that we face and also to grasp the opportunities that we can create.'

Elizabeth, 18, Surrey

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We are extremely grateful to everyone who offered their time, experience and expertise to this project. We sought, throughout, to involve representatives from a broad range of ages, backgrounds and perspectives, to enrich our recommendations and call for action.

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Cumberland Lodge empowers people, through dialogue and debate, to tackle the causes and effects of social division.

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