Compass Project:

Guiding minds and inspiring action in climate change education

A roadmap for schools, colleges and universities in England

Climate Cares Centre

IMPERIAL

Executive Summary

There is an urgent need to support young people to navigate diverse climate change-related emotions and experiences, and to build and sustain strong mental health and purpose in an uncertain world. Young people also need opportunities to imagine the future they want to be a part of, and see their role in creating it.

In this report, we explore how this can be achieved through integrating emotional resilience into climate change education. Emotional resilience includes the social and emotional skills that can promote wellbeing, help prevent mental health challenges from developing, and improve academic attainment. In the context of climate change, this can look like creating space to learn about and process climate-related emotions, or supporting young people to build agency for climate action.

The Compass Project report, led by the Climate Cares Centre at Imperial College London and the University of Oxford, brings together a network of youth and educator advisors and sector experts. It explores the **views of 200+ students (aged 16-29 years old) and educators from schools, colleges, and universities across England** on integrating emotional resilience into climate change education.

This report presents a roadmap for how education can support every student and educator with the knowledge, skills, agency and resilience needed to live, work and thrive in a rapidly changing world. It covers:

- **Where we are now:** What students and educators are experiencing today.

- **Where we need to get to:** A collective vision for the future of climate change education that builds emotional resilience and promotes and supports youth mental health and wellbeing.

- **How do we get from here to there:** Actions to drive change towards this collective vision, grounded in what's already working well.

KEY MESSAGES

- **There is a need for change.** Currently, climate change education risks exacerbating climate distress and disengagement, and disempowering students and educators. Only 15% of school and college students feel their education prepares them for a future in a changing climate. While there is increasing inclusion of climate change across subjects and activities in education in ways that build emotional resilience and promote mental health, a vision of how to embed this into cultures and curricula is lacking. Informal and one-off initiatives, while valuable, can widen inequalities in student experiences.

- **Enacting change requires understanding and addressing key barriers within the education system and the wider social, economic, political contexts that shape it.** A lack of prioritisation for climate change education and protecting mental health, lack of time, funding and educator support exists. This is compounded by wider issues of stigma and misinformation around mental health and climate change, young people's feelings of powerlessness, and a lack of transparent dialogue in education on the complex interplay of political, economic and social drivers of the climate crisis and mental health crisis.

KEY MESSAGES *cont.*

- **Students and educators envisioned a future education system** where mental health and wellbeing can flourish for all, every student leaves education with more skills to prepare them to navigate a changing world, all students and staff can engage with transformative climate action in ways that support their mental health and wellbeing, and leadership enables a systemic shift for integrating the skills of emotional resilience and mental health promotion into climate change education.

- **Clear pathways towards this collective future vision exist.** The most important and feasible actions, as identified by students and educators, include:
  - Connecting students with nature
  - Embedding psychologically-informed climate change education into every subject
  - Providing support to cope with diverse climate-related emotions
  - Framing climate change education to focus on climate solutions and real-world relevance for young people's lives
  - Appropriate resourcing (time and funding) and support for educators.

- **These actions align with what is already being called for by campaigners of climate change and environmental education.**[1-3] Making clear that such actions can also benefit - and depend on - mental health support and emotional resilience-building should be factored into advocacy efforts, cost-benefit analyses and investment decisions.

- **The full scope of costs and benefits of existing initiatives are not yet being measured.** We heard of climate, environment and sustainability initiatives building emotional resilience. We heard of mental health and wellbeing initiatives creating opportunities to talk about climate change-related emotions. Many without being designed this way, and often without evaluation embedded. Existing actions in schools, colleges and universities might already be having much wider, subtle ripple effects. Hidden risks - such as exacerbating climate distress - must also be measured.

- **Many initiatives are already being put into practice.** Evaluation and investment are needed to learn from, scale and adapt effective interventions, and to shift from 'one off' actions to embedded practices across the education system.

- **Collective action across sectors** is needed to integrate emotional resilience into climate change education. This report recommends that:
  - **Government** integrate the links between climate change education and emotional resilience into relevant strategies, guidance and resourcing as core to supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing, and to building the skills and opportunities that enable young people to thrive. Examples include: 1) curriculum reform; 2) educator training and professional development; 3) whole school, college and university approaches to mental health and wellbeing; 4) Sustainability Leads; 5) Senior Mental Health Leads, 6) National Youth Strategy.
  - **Schools, colleges and universities** build or join communities of practice to share and learn about what works and provide peer support for educators, dedicate time for emotional resilience-building in climate education, and prioritise professional development opportunities that empower staff to integrate emotional resilience-building and climate change into their teaching.
  - **Organisations working with the education system** amplify existing resources, interventions and learnings through relevant networks and platforms.
  - **Researchers** work with the government to understand where evidence is needed to drive action, and partner with schools, colleges, universities, and organisations to evaluate what works. **Research funders** need to make more resources available to enable this evidence building.
  - **Young people** are meaningfully listened to, learned from and supported to co-create climate, environmental, mental health and wellbeing action in schools, colleges, universities, local communities and government.

KEY MESSAGES *cont.*

- **Students and educators were aligned** in a collective vision for the future of education - what needs to change, and on how to get there. **Intergenerational discussion that centres both students and educators in decision** making for schools, colleges, universities and nationally is needed to put this report's roadmap into practice, in ways that reflect local contexts.

A moment of opportunity

The sustained and transformative social change that responding to the climate crisis demands can only be achieved with a focus on **inner development** - our emotions, thoughts, identities and beliefs - that underpin our actions.[4] Our actions, in turn, shape our beliefs, agency and emotions.[5]

Strengthening young people's capacity to cope with climate change also helps them to cope with other challenging experiences and pressures on their mental health.[6] This is increasingly critical, as climate change compounds a growing youth mental health crisis and places additional strain on a mental health system already unable to meet demand.

Centering emotional resilience in climate change education, in ways that can reach every student, is an opportunity to promote and support student mental health and wellbeing, sustain climate action, and improve educational outcomes that equip young people with the skills and opportunities for life and work in a changing climate.

Now is the moment to ensure that mental health and emotional resilience are at the heart of climate change education, so that education truly empowers young people in a changing world.[7,8]

> *"Hope is a radical thing, the way we can **stay alive and imagine a better present and future,** because if we can't imagine it, we can't work to make it happen [...] As the world seems to get scarier, it is more important than ever to **seek a healthy way of expressing and experiencing your feelings."***

school | *student*

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Section 1

inc. *approach*

Current Experiences
Section 2

Where we are and what needs to change:
- Climate change education is disempowering and disconnected
- Limited, narrow, unengaging climate change education content
- Educators lack support, training, time and funding
- Leadership on climate action, particularly in ways that integrate emotional resilience, feels invisible
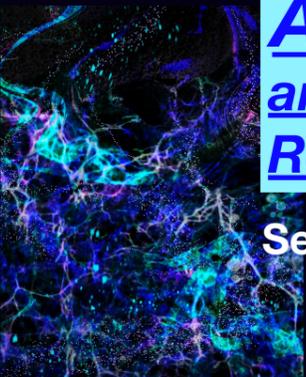
Vision
Section 3

Where we need to get to:
- Mental health and wellbeing can flourish for all
- All students gain more skills to navigate a changing future
- Students and staff engage in transformative climate action that supports mental health and wellbeing
- Leadership enables a systemic shift for integrating emotional resilience into climate change education

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- Curriculum reform
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- Solutions-focussed, real-world climate change education
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- Visible leadership on climate action and emotional resilience
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1 Introduction

Young people in the UK are facing a growing mental health crisis.[9] Many local and global challenges are compromising young people's mental health and wellbeing[10] - including the escalating threat of climate change. Today's youth will have a lifetime of navigating the realities of a changing climate, and the societal transformations that responding to the crisis demands.

Young people can be particularly at risk of experiencing the negative physical and mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change.[11] **Learning about the climate crisis can evoke a wide range of psychological responses**, including fear, worry, distress, anger, guilt, hopelessness, hope, powerlessness and betrayal.[13,14] These are often healthy and rational responses, indicative of young people's care for people and the planet, and can be powerful motivators of action.[15,16] However, these responses can also be challenging to cope with, can disrupt daily life (e.g., studying, sleeping, relationships)[13] and can increase risk of poor mental health.[17,18] Some other common psychological responses, such as **denial and disengagement,** can be barriers to taking climate action.[19,20] Witnessing inaction, feelings of betrayal,[13] exclusion from decision making and lack of agency can make climate emotions and distress harder for young people to cope with.[16,21] Engaging in climate action can foster hope, belonging and agency[20,22] and strengthen communities, but without the right support, it also carries **risks of burnout and being emotionally overwhelmed.**[16,23,24]

Young people are also being increasingly **exposed to more frequent and severe extreme weather,** such as heatwaves and floods in the UK,[11] which can negatively impact mental health and development.[11,20,25] Climate change impacts are disrupting the social and economic determinants of good mental health; driving displacement, financial instability, food insecurity, and loss of access to education, healthcare and safe housing.[11,20] **Climate change is compounding a growing youth mental health crisis, placing additional strain on a mental health system that is already unable to meet demand.**[9]

This is also **widening inequities;** young people who experience structural disadvantages (e.g., those living in low-income households), or who have pre-existing mental health conditions, face higher risks of experiencing negative mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change.[11] Direct experience of climate impacts may interact with psychological responses to climate change, such as fear and worry about the next flood. The need for preventing mental ill health, early intervention when symptoms appear, and breaking down barriers to accessing mental health care is increasingly critical. **The physical and mental health toll of climate change is also affecting young people's development,[26] educational attendance[27] and attainment.[28]** Test scores and attendance, for example, are worse on hot days.[27]

There is a growing and, we believe, urgent need to support young people with the knowledge, skills and agency to navigate diverse climate change-related emotions and experiences, to build and sustain strong mental health and purpose in an uncertain future, and to imagine the transformed future they want to help create.

This report explores how this can be achieved through integrating emotional resilience into climate change education. Emotional resilience (see 'Key Concepts') includes the social and emotional skills to build and sustain good mental health and wellbeing in a changing world. This includes individual (e.g., personal coping strategies) and collective resilience (e.g., connected and supportive communities). Emotional resilience-building can promote wellbeing, help prevent mental health challenges from developing, and improve academic attainment. Resilience is not just about young people learning skills. It also requires people in power to take action to address factors - such as climate change - that can undermine young people's ability to thrive.

Many young people want this. Young people report wanting climate change education (CCE) that builds agency and creates opportunities to take climate action,[29,30] and creates spaces to discuss mental health and wellbeing. However, 6 in 10 young people in the UK report not feeling part of decisions about their school's climate actions, and not discussing climate change solutions in class.[29] **Many educators also want change.** Teachers report lacking the time, funding, and training[31] needed to build the confidence, awareness, and knowledge to support students to cope with diverse emotions and inspire climate action while teaching about climate change.[32]

The **2025 Curriculum and Assessment Review in England**[33] paves the way for more integration of climate change in the national curriculum, and a greater focus on skills that prepare young people

for their futures. The **2023 Sustainability and Climate Change strategy**[34] sets out an ambition for education and children's services systems in England, including CCE. However, neither report explicitly highlights the need for training and time for educators to embed emotional resilience in climate change-related lessons.

By centering emotional resilience in CCE, education can better prepare young people to live, thrive and act in a rapidly changing world.[35-37] **Doing so is critical for supporting student mental health and wellbeing, sustaining climate action, and improving educational outcomes.**

Strengthening young people's ability to process and express challenging emotions and develop agency and resilience in relation to climate change, can also **offer broader benefits** of normalising mental health conversations and strengthening young people's capacity to cope with diverse challenging experiences.[6] Especially given that climate change is putting youth mental health further at risk,[11] this is essential for safeguarding and promoting good mental health[38] and preparing young people for their futures.[7,8]

The Compass Project, established in 2024, set out to **build evidence that could inform integrated action to support youth mental health and wellbeing in the context of CCE.** We worked with and for young people (aged 16-29) and educators in secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges, and universities in England. We focus on further and higher education. However, many of the educators involved also work with younger age groups, and many students involved drew on their earlier education experiences. Insights, examples and recommendations may therefore hold wider relevance across secondary education.

Focusing on schools, colleges and universities in England,
the **Compass Project set out to understand:**

- What young people aged 16-29 and educators **experience now**, in terms of support for mental health, wellbeing and emotional resilience building in CCE.

- **What success would look like** for education that empowers young people to live, work and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

- What the **barriers and opportunities** are to achieving this vision of success.

- What's **already working well** that can be learnt from and scaled.

This report shares research insights and sets out practical recommendations to make progress towards an education system where **every student and educator has the knowledge, skills, agency** needed to live, thrive, and act in a rapidly changing world.

key concepts used in this report

- **Mental health***: a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community.[42] Mental health is experienced differently from one person to the next, and people can experience good and poor mental health at different points in their life.

- **Mental ill health** (including conditions such as depression and anxiety) involves thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that affect a person's ability to function in one or more areas of life and often involve significant levels of psychological distress.

- **Climate change education (CCE)**: equips people to understand and address the impacts of the climate crisis, empowering them with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed to act as agents of change.[46]

- **Wellbeing***: a positive state experienced by people that encompasses quality of life and the ability of people to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose.[43]

- **Agency**: the power people have to think for themselves and act in ways that shape their experiences and life trajectories, and is exhibited in individual and collective forms.

- **Emotional resilience**: the ability to cope with and adapt to challenging life experiences.[44] Resilience is not just about bouncing back, but also the capacity for transformation and growth.[45] In this report, emotional resilience means the social and emotional skills to build and sustain good mental health and wellbeing in a changing world. Emotional resilience can be developed individually and collectively (through supportive relationships, communities and environments).

* *'Mental health' is used broadly throughout this report, and is inclusive of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing.*

Our approach

The Compass Project is coordinated by the 🔗 **_Climate Cares Centre_** at at Imperial College London and the University of Oxford, and supported by the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Global.

The project team includes:

- **Youth Advisory Board***: seven young people aged 16-29 currently studying in the UK.

- **Educators Advisory Board***: eight people involved in delivering education with 16-29 year olds in the UK.

- **Expert Working Group:** Around 20 representatives from organisations and initiatives working at the intersection of youth mental health, CCE and climate action in the UK and globally.

*Advisory board members were identified through an open call and short application process, and members selected based on diversity of experience, age, gender and geography.

We ran **group discussions** and an **online survey** with students (aged 16-29) and educators in secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges (collectively referred to in this report as 'schools and colleges'), and universities in England. Six online group discussions were held between February-March 2025, with a total of 46 participants. An online survey was completed by 210 participants between June-October 2025.

Research data was shared back with students and educators in **co-design workshops** to co-create recommendations, communication strategies and outputs. Youth and educator advisors co-designed project methods and led the facilitation of all group discussions and workshops. Full methods can be found in the Appendix.

A total of 256* responses from students and educators were included.

Participants who opted into the project tended to already be engaged with CCE and/or climate action.

- **94 school and college students aged 16-19** (14 group discussion participants, 80 survey participants)

- **74 university students aged 18-29** (18 group discussion participants, 56 survey participants)

- **34 school and college staff** (8 group discussion participants, 26 survey participants)

- **37 university staff** (6 group discussion participants, 31 survey participants)

- **17 people working in other roles with young people in education settings** (survey participants)

*Note this reflects total responses, including from participants who took part in both the group discussions and survey.

2 Current Experiences

of climate concern and climate change education

This section presents insights from students and educators on their current experiences of mental health, wellbeing and emotional resilience in CCE, what needs to change, and the barriers currently holding back change.

Levels of climate worry were found to be high among both students and educators in our survey sample, particularly in universities. In schools and colleges, 55% of students and 74% educators were very or extremely worried about climate change. In universities, 84% of students and 83% of educators were very or extremely worried. This worry can impact daily life; almost half (49%) of university students said their feelings about climate change affected aspects such as sleeping, studying and relationships. However, **education is not keeping pace with levels of concern.** While opportunities to discuss emotions and mental health in CCE exist, these are mostly informal and not consistently integrated.

We heard a clear call for change. Students often reported that currently, CCE can feel disempowering, disconnected, unengaging, and missing opportunities for them to build critical skills and resilience for a changing future. Without providing examples of solutions and appropriate support - for both students and educators - to cope and act, CCE risks driving both climate distress and disengagement. Educators are lacking relevant training and resources. Leadership on climate action (particularly in ways that integrate emotional resilience) by schools, colleges and universities can feel invisible.

Barriers to change exist within the education system and the wider social, economic, political contexts that shape it - including mental health stigma, climate denial, and the social dynamics and injustices that drive the climate crisis and poor mental health. **Preparing young people for a climate-changed future requires addressing barriers within education systems, and acknowledging and exploring the influence of wider contexts on young people and on education.**[47]

While much needs to change, there is also huge progress underway that can be learned from and scaled (see Section 4). This can support a transformed education system that aligns with the desired collective vision we heard from students and educators (see Section 3).

young people

school and college

university

55%	**84**%	... said they were **very or extremely worried** that climate change threatens people, nature and the planet.*
20%	**49**%	... said this worry **affects their daily lives** *(e.g., studying, sleeping, eating, relationships).*
7%	**39**%	... said they learn about climate change, the environment and sustainability **most of the time or always** *(i.e. this was the focus of their subjects).*

Of those who **did** learn about climate change...

13%	**19**%	said this includes **formal opportunities** *(e.g., as part of lessons)*
30%	**35**%	said this includes **informal opportunities** *(e.g., informal discussions with peers or teachers)...*

...to **learn or talk** about emotions or mental health.

37%	**55**%	... feel their place of education **acts in line with their own values** about climate change, the environment and sustainability.
15%	**48**%	... feel their education **prepares them for a future** in a changing climate.

Previous research in 2021 found that 49% of 16-25 UK year olds were very or extremely worried about climate change.[13] This difference with our findings could reflect our smaller, self-selecting, climate-aware participant group, and/or change over time.

educators

school and college   *university*

74%   **83**%   … said they were **very or extremely worried** that climate change threatens people, nature and the planet.

39%   **33**%   … said this worry **affects their daily lives** *(e.g., studying, sleeping, eating, relationships).*

46%   **43**%   … have had **training or professional development**** related to climate change, environment and sustainability education.

67%   **58**%   …of those who did have training, said that training **mentioned of mental health and wellbeing.**

46%   **36**%   … said climate change, the environment and sustainability comes up **always or most of the time** in their work with students.

Of those…

9%   **9**%   said this includes **formal opportunities** *(e.g., as part of lessons)*

55%   **30**%   said this includes **informal opportunities** *(e.g., informal discussions with peers or students)…*

…to **learn or talk** about emotions or mental health.

30%   **33**%   … feel their place of education **acts in line with their own values** about climate change, the environment and sustainability

**This aligns with a previous larger scale survey with teachers in England, which found that 45% had participated in formal professional development related to climate change and sustainability. Less than 13% reported that their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) included a focus on climate change and sustainability (UCL 2023)

The need for change

Currently, CCE can feel disempowering and disconnected.

Students and educators told us that information about climate change, the environment and sustainability is often **disconnected from what is relevant and relatable to young people's own lives and futures,** from practical opportunities for action, and from opportunities to unpack emotional responses. Individual responsibility and outlining the problem is often the focus, instead of **collective agency and sharing positive** examples of solutions. This is driving both climate distress and disengagement.

"Although [young people] may be shocked by some of the photographs that they're seeing, if they can't necessarily see how that directly relates to their life, I think that's sometimes what causes them anxiety. They can't make that link from a shocking picture back to their life."

school educator

"[My education] increases my worry because despite being a biology course, and many of my modules being based around ecosystems, the environment and animal behaviour, climate change is not a central theme or something brought up regularly in my learning."

university student

"We have a huge amount of kids living in deprivation. So kind of making them think, oh, I've got to install solar panels on my roof, isn't necessarily attainable, especially when they're not making the decisions at home. So moving from fear to hope based teaching and hope based practices where students think that they can access the kind of practices and the tools that they need to make a difference, rather than just focusing on this idea of catastrophe."

school educator

"We aren't given 'solutions' but also our curriculum isn't connected to (local) community action that we can tangibly get involved in."

university student

"*There seems to be a* **passive feeling** *amongst my age cohort...*

...and despite most accepting the truth of climate change...

...they feel removed and disempowered."

university   student

The content of CCE feels limited, narrow and unengaging.

CCE is also missing opportunities to **build key skills that can prepare young people** for their futures in a rapidly changing world (e.g., navigating social media, sitting with uncertainty and complexity, problem solving, emotional regulation, building meaning, purpose and agency, thinking critically and systemically about societal, political and economic dynamics influencing climate change and climate action).

"A lot of [information] young people get comes from social media and online. In my experience that has been a slight issue with some learners… particularly if they've not got the skills or ability to sift through that information. So that's a challenge. It's a very complicated challenge, but for their mental health and their preparedness for climate change and the world they're going into, that's a big problem that I see."

school **educator**

Educators lack appropriate support.

Educators spoke of **feeling unequipped to facilitate discussions** about climate-related emotions, lacking access to relevant resources and training, and experiencing overwhelm in the face of multiple priorities in resource-limited settings.

Educators need to feel equipped to support **diverse experiences, needs and emotional responses.** For example, supporting neurodivergent students and educators to process climate change, and minority groups and young people from urban environments who may not feel safe or represented in nature-based narratives.

"I think overwhelm is a huge challenge at the moment, lots of teachers feel the national curriculum is really demanding already. Their role has grown, I think. Unfortunately, I think a lot of the answers are systems level change, empowering teachers, enabling them to have the time. Every time we go into a school and say, do you want to help greening your curriculum? The answer is always yes, but I don't have the time."

school **educator**

Leadership on climate action can feel invisible.

Leadership on climate action (particularly in ways that integrate emotional resilience) by schools, colleges and universities can feel invisible, lacking transparency, and reliant on particular staff members or students rather than integrated into whole school approaches.

"Good initiatives (which often don't last due to a lack of support) appear outside of the taught curriculum, which suggests to me that these ideas aren't being explored within teaching."

survey participant

"[My work has a] huge range of impacts on my feelings, including often inspiring me, energising me and giving me hope - but overall the effect is to deepen my concerns and add to my stress levels."

school | educator

"I think it's quite unfair. Relying on students to do work that I feel sustainability departments should do and relying on students to give up their time to pressure people in authority positions at the university to make changes."

university | student

"I have seen many inspiring student-led initiatives for climate action, but they also highlight a challenge: young people who are most motivated to create change often lack the power and platform to influence wider systems… Without recognition and support from governments and institutions, these initiatives struggle to scale or become embedded into everyday education."

survey participant

What is **holding back** change?

Schools, colleges, and universities can face significant challenges in implementing change. Barriers exist both **within education systems and in the wider social and economic contexts** that shape them, and ultimately can make it harder to prepare young people to live, work and thrive in a climate-changed future.

What makes it harder in schools and colleges **to prepare young people for a climate-changed future while supporting their mental health and wellbeing?**

Barrier	*Students* who experienced this barrier*	*Educators* who experienced this barrier*
Climate change, mental health and their interconnections are a **low priority** for schools and colleges	64%	52%
Lack of funding (or other resources) for initiatives related to climate change and mental health	46%	48%
Wider problems in society, such as unfair systems and capitalism	56%	33%
Lack of time to learn or talk about how climate change and mental health are connected	41%	48%
Lack of climate action leadership by schools and colleges	23%	62%
Feeling powerless, like students or educators can't make a difference	51%	33%
Lack of educator support (e.g., training) on how climate change and mental health are connected	21%	52%

Participants were asked to indicate all the barriers they experienced

What makes it harder in universities **to prepare young people for a climate-changed future while supporting their mental health and wellbeing?**

Barrier	*Students* who experienced this barrier*	*Educators* who experienced this barrier*
Climate change, mental health and their interconnections are a **low priority** for schools and colleges	55%	55%
Wider problems in society, such as unfair systems and capitalism	41%	60%
Lack of time to learn or talk about how climate change and mental health are connected	41%	60%
Lack of funding (or other resources) for initiatives related to climate change and mental health	39%	55%
Misinformation about climate change, climate action and mental health	52%	40%
Education systems already have to deal with **many pressures on young people's mental health**	41%	40%
Feeling powerless, like students or educators can't make a difference	48%	30%

Participants were asked to indicate all the barriers they experienced

Barriers within education systems

Major barriers shared by both students and educators were a **lack of prioritisation** and low awareness of how climate change, mental health and wellbeing are linked.

Limited time, funding and other resources to implement change was highlighted as a key barrier, particularly by educators. This included **lack of appropriate support, training and agency** for educators, a sense of overwhelm, and shifts in what is being expected from the role of an educator. Educators spoke of fear of inducing distress among students by discussing climate change, or of getting the facts wrong, while also navigating student disengagement with climate change and climate action.

Approaches that **separate knowledge from emotions,** or treat mental health as an isolated topic rather than being embedded across all parts of schools, colleges and universities, hold back integrated action and can be a challenge for both educators and students to navigate.

> *"I've asked the careers advisor why there's nothing about sustainability in the induction careers talk that they give to everyone. They say because they don't want to shame the students into feeling guilty."*

university | **student**

> *"We want to teach about climate change. But there's anxiety for the educator to say, what if I set some sort of chain reaction of concern amongst these children, how do I deal with that?"*

school | **educator**

> *"I have personally been told by a university therapist that what I'm talking about is "too political" for therapy because we are expected to be isolated individuals whose emotions somehow exist outside of the social world. Obviously this is extremely harmful."*

university | **student**

"Climate change and mental health still comes…

…much to
my horror,

…to the bottom of the list."

university educator

Barriers influencing education systems

Social, political, economic and environmental factors, which may fall outside of the control of education systems but nevertheless shape them, were highlighted as holding back integration of emotional resilience into CCE. **Students and educators called for the education system to be more aware** of how these wider factors influence young people, create space to acknowledge and discuss them, and to take steps to avoid perpetuating harm.

Social, economic and political contexts that influence both mental health and climate change were highlighted as barriers to good mental health and wellbeing, community building, engagement with CCE, and to transformative and collective climate and societal action. This included capitalism, consumerism, individualism, colonialism, political and economic instability, and unfair systems driving inequity. Students and educators discussed the influence of these contexts on education systems, and the lack of transparent dialogue in classrooms about their complex interplay with climate change and mental health in education. The importance of putting climate change into context with (and as a compounder of) other pressures in the lives of young people and their families was highlighted. This included the inaccessibility of climate action for many young people and the intersections with privilege.

Young people spoke of complex emotions around **feeling powerless,** facing pressures (e.g., from adults in their lives) to be optimistic about the future, and afraid to speak out about climate change. Many spoke of grappling with guilt about lifestyle adjustments, and discomfort with perceptions of climate activism and with the options for action available to them.

Stigma and misinformation around both mental health and climate action was highlighted as a key barrier to collective discussion, peer connection, and educators' engagement with students. Politicisation, polarisation (e.g., climate denial) and radicalisation around climate issues, driven particularly by social media, was also highlighted as a barrier to young people engaging with climate change and with each other. Research by Another Way found that 59% of 11-18 year olds reported negative reactions - including bullying - from peers as a result of being involved in environmental initiatives, with many saying this was driven by perceptions of environmental action as 'uncool'. Almost 40% said that bullying or peer pressure negatively impacted their wellbeing and/or involvement in action.[48]

"I think there is real stigma about [being engaged with climate change]...

...it's kind of uncool

...to become so attached to a moral issue and to be sort of fixated on it."

university | student
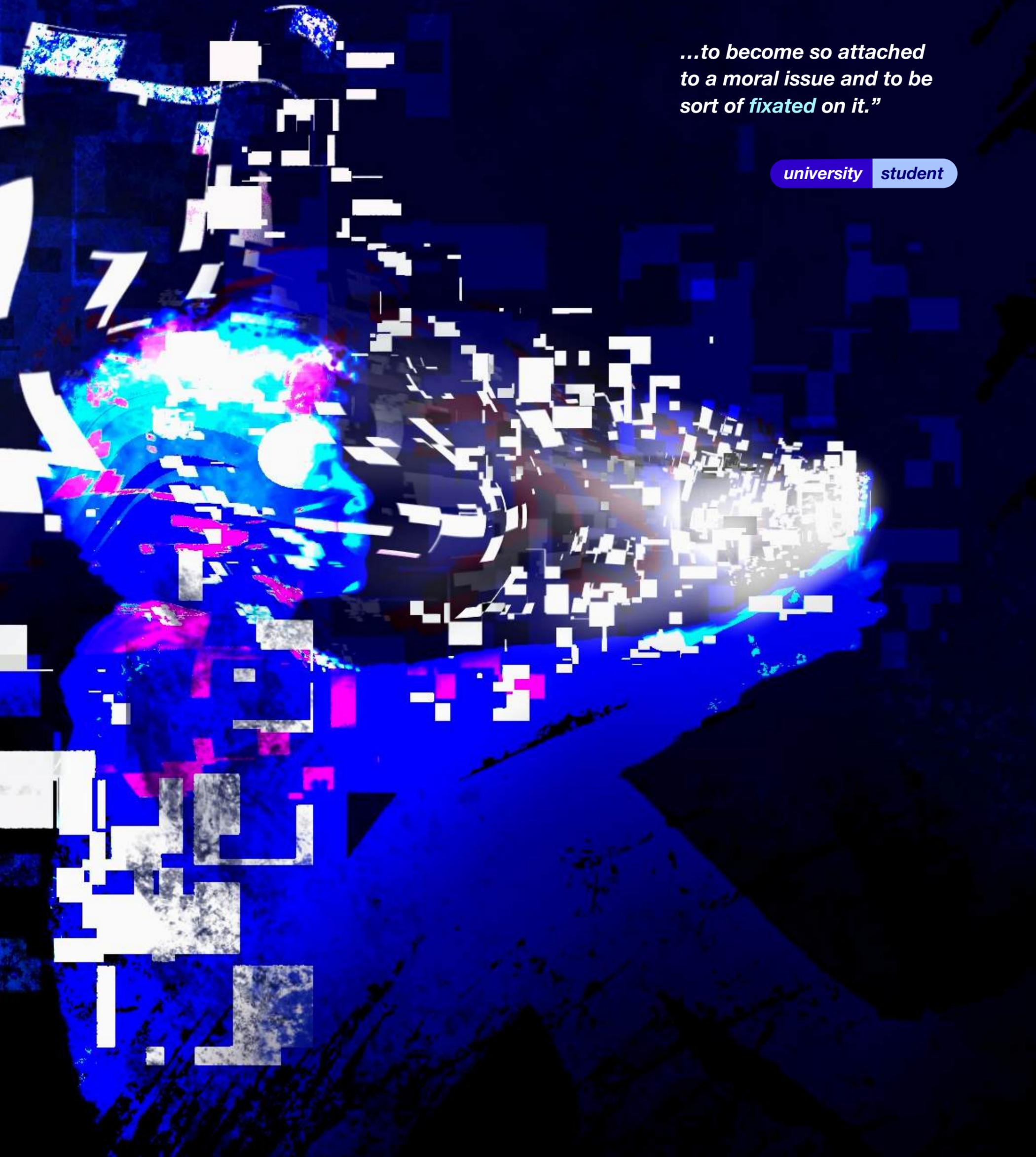
"[In my classroom] I feel like [climate denial] is very 50/50."

school | student

*"University… sets students up to work for really big corporations like the Big Four [the four largest professional service companies globally]. So I wonder, a barrier may be that **there may not be anything to gain from supporting students' mental health because what is that contributing to capitalist society?** So it ties into how our society is structured and that there is no obvious gain, economic gain, from supporting students' mental health."*

university | student

*"There are a lot of families… who are living in financial distress. And so the main priorities is a roof over their head, food in their mouth and trying to navigate clothing, because heating isn't available to them so I think that leads on into **the conversation of who is privileged enough to feel distressed publicly about the climate crisis,** and I think there's a wider discussion and conversation around this."*

school | educator

*"There is a more basic problem - **I don't think that there is a widely-accepted link between climate concerns and mental health.** I don't see it with my own students, for example. Perhaps I am just unaware, but if that's the case, so are most of my colleagues, I suspect."*

school | educator

3

Vision

A roadmap for integrating emotional resilience into climate change education in England

This section presents a collective vision for a future of education where CCE and emotional resilience are integrated across educational curricula, cultures, and communities. Every student and educator is supported to thrive, equipped with the knowledge, skills, agency and resilience needed to live, work and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

This vision is grounded in the views of **200+ students and educators** and the project's working group of experts at the intersection of youth mental health, CCE and climate action.

We set out **core components** of a desired future, responding to the need for change outlined in Section 2 to ensure successful CCE while simultaneously supporting and promoting youth mental health and wellbeing.

"*Creating safe spaces for open dialogue will validate [students'] feelings.* Connecting climate change to local, relevant issues and adopting interdisciplinary, systems thinking approaches will provide a holistic understanding, while prioritising outdoor education strengthens their connection to nature."

university   educator

"*Climate change education should include emotional literacy skills,* teaching students how to identify, express, and manage their emotions about the [climate] crisis."

university   student

"To truly protect young people's mental health and prepare them for a future shaped by climate change, schools and universities need to **systematically integrate climate education, provide mental health support linked to eco anxiety, and create partnerships that empower students to be part of real solutions.** Crucially, these efforts must be backed by **government policy and resources** so that climate education is not left to small-scale projects but becomes a consistent, sustainable part of mainstream education."

university   student

"Climate education has come under science and geography… But it's very narrow and *if it's a society wide problem, it needs a society wide solution.*

There's a real place for people who are passionate about art to see how art fits in and people who are passionate about DT to understand circular economy and *to have a sense of empowerment* that if you're not a scientist, if you're not a geographer, there is still a place for your skill set and your way of thinking and your way of being in the world that can take action.

I think a *subject wide curriculum where every subject steps up* and brings their unique contribution is really, really important."

school   educator

"*I would love to see universities be a genuinely nurturing place…* Teach students to take agency and to know the regulations, know their rules and their rights.

And I think that that is going to build better citizens, not just in terms of climate change, but just better students… *to teach emotional resiliency.*"

university   educator

Core Components

A collective vision for the future of education

Education settings are environments where mental health and wellbeing can flourish for all.

Cultures of community, care and belonging exist for all students and educators, enabled through whole-setting approaches (across schools, colleges and universities)[40,41] that embed mental health and wellbeing.

Students and staff are supported to cope with a full spectrum of climate emotions, including holding uncertainty, fear and hope together.

Emotional resilience is a core part of teaching. Educators are confident to facilitate age-appropriate discussions about climate-related emotions, and are able to signpost to mental health support when needed. Educators are supported with their own mental health and wellbeing.

Every student leaves education with more skills that prepare them to navigate a changing future.

Education prioritises relevant **skills that prepare young people for their futures.** This encompasses resilience, empowerment, agency and social, emotional, relational and technical skills.

Climate change and emotional resilience are treated as core to curriculums and cultures, not add-ons. Educators have the time, resources, and support they need to weave climate change and emotional resilience into every subject.

This focus on **future-relevant skills is driven not only by content, but also by pedagogy** — the art and science of teaching itself, encompassing the theories, methods, and practices used to help students learn.

Core Components *cont.*

A collective vision for the future of education

All students and staff can engage with transformative climate action in ways that support their mental health and wellbeing.

Young people know how their **diverse skill sets and interests can play a part in creating the future** they want to see.

Students and staff can see **how their own actions are part of a wider system of collective action,** supported by senior leadership, fostering community and belonging.

Students and staff know **how to engage in accessible, meaningful, collective climate action** - and have opportunities to get involved in their school, college, university, or local community. Staff sustainability leaders have the time and resources they need to drive meaningful change.

Leadership enables a systemic shift for integrated climate change education and emotional resilience.

Senior leaders in the education sector **champion the integration of climate change education and emotional resilience,** making this visible, valued and resourced.

Schools, colleges and universities act as community hubs for hands-on climate adaptation projects that support youth mental health and wellbeing.[8,49]

Progress towards this desired future state is already underway in schools, colleges and universities.

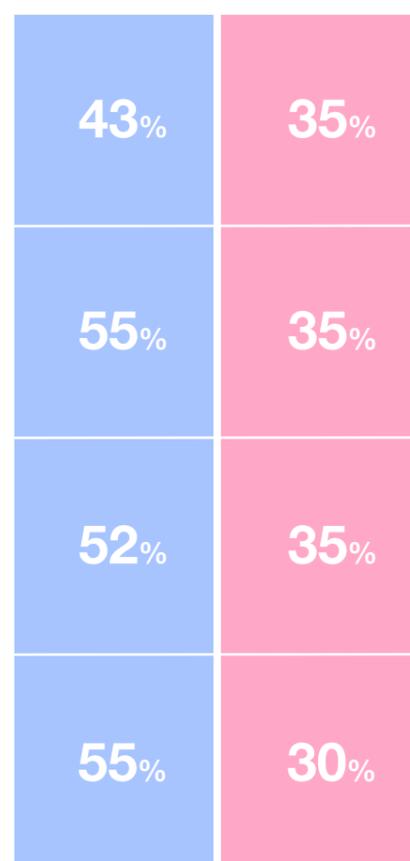**However, there is further to go...**

What did students and educators say already happens in their school or college?
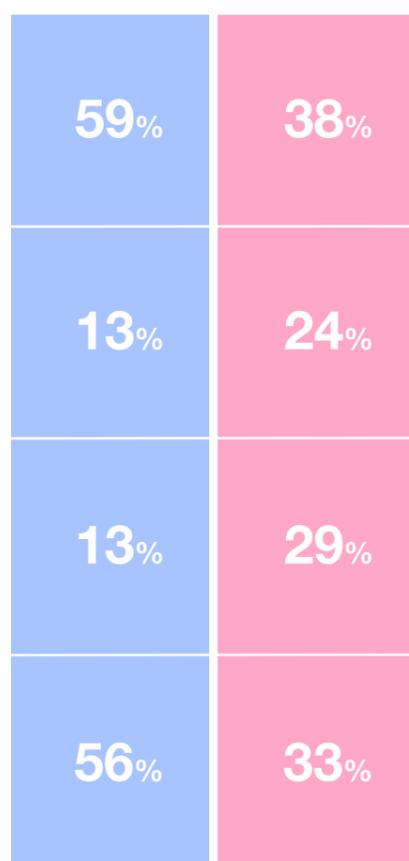
What did students and educators say already happens in their university?

students	educators		students	educators		
59%	38%		43%	35%		… said **mental health and wellbeing is prioritised and supported,** including in the context of climate change.
13%	24%		55%	35%		… said skills that **prepare young people for a future** in a changing climate are prioritised.
13%	29%		52%	35%		… said students can take **meaningful climate action** in ways that support their mental health and wellbeing
56%	33%		55%	30%		… said **students and staff work together** on climate action and decision making.

We heard many examples of what students and educators feel is already working well, that can provide the stepping stones to enacting this vision (Section 4). However, students and educators told us this **progress tends to be "in small pockets" or "to a limited extent," rather than integrated and prioritised** in school, college or university-wide and whole of society approaches.

Imagining how this vision could look

When **Priya became headteacher,** staff were exhausted and students were struggling with rising anxiety. Climate change was at the bottom of a long list of priorities. Supported by a national government roll out of guidance and resources, Priya led a shift toward a whole school approach to climate change, sustainability and wellbeing, designed with students. All staff received training on how to acknowledge, validate and support emotional responses to climate change, and how to talk about climate change in ways that can foster agency, hope and meaning.

This lens is brought into existing teaching content, rather than feeling like an add on. Teachers have access to reflective peer support sessions. **The Sustainability Lead is supported** through dedicated time and funding for their role and works closely with the Senior Mental Health Lead. The school has partnered with the local council to establish a **new youth hub,** run by teachers, youth workers and volunteers, where young people can get involved with l**ocal climate adaptation projects.** Students and staff are currently creating a new wildlife corridor, and students say they feel more confident and hopeful about their future, and a stronger sense of belonging. **Staff wellbeing has improved, and the school's culture has shifted.**

Leo is in his second year studying engineering at university. He arrived at university feeling overwhelmed by the climate crisis and unsure how his degree connected to it. This year, his university updated every course to include a climate change, environment and sustainability lens across existing content – including the emotional dimensions of climate change.

Leo's lecturer invites students to **reflect on the ethical and social implications** of engineering decisions. They also **discuss the feelings** - such as frustration, hope and responsibility - that come with designing for an uncertain world. The university's wellbeing service **runs drop-in sessions** about climate change, co-facilitated by trained student peers. Leo's also part of a university-wide **social action lab,** working together with students from psychology, business, and the arts on **real-world climate adaptation projects** with local councils. For the first time, climate change feels less like a threat and more like a future Leo can help shape.

Turning a collective vision into action

This vision sets out a high-level direction for education in England: creating environments where emotional resilience and CCE are integrated to empower young people in a changing world. It is not a one-size-fits-all blueprint. Success will look different across schools, colleges, universities, communities, and for individual students and staff.

Turning this vision into practical, tangible goals within a specific education setting or local area requires local interpretation and co-design. This means embracing a diversity of strategies and solutions, rather than prescribing a single model. Students and educators must be at the heart of this process, shaping strategies that reflect their unique needs, priorities, and opportunities.

The education sector operates within a rapidly changing social and environmental context. This vision must evolve with it. Rapid change also creates opportunities to learn from what works and build on the momentum of growing awareness and action around CCE, mental health and wellbeing. and their intersection.

For example, during the course of this 18 month project:

- One in four schools have a sustainability lead in September 2025, compared to 18% in September 2024.

- Senior mental health lead training grants have been taken up by 70% of schools and colleges in 2024, compared to 58% in 2023.

- 🔗 The Belem Health Action Plan, a global framework for integrating health into climate action endorsed by 50 countries in November 2025, includes a priority action to integrate climate and health education into school curricula in ways that foster psychosocial wellbeing.

"In the time of the Compass Project...

...my school now has a
sustainability lead...

*...We have introduced ecology
and permaculture to years 7-9,
and have the Natural History GCSE."*

educator advisor

4 Actions and Recommendations
to drive change

This section maps out the most important and practically feasible pathways towards the collective vision outlined in Section 3. Each recommended action is grounded in our research with students and educators, the wider evidence base, and what is being called for by others across the sector.

Through our research, we heard that many actions and initiatives are already working well. These can be learnt from, shared, adapted and scaled up across education settings. Often, students and educators shared examples of climate and environment-focused actions that were building emotional resilience - without being designed this way. Similarly, we heard of general mental health and wellbeing initiatives that were creating opportunities to talk about climate change-related emotions and experiences. This highlights that **many of the actions schools, colleges and universities are already taking might be having much wider-reaching benefits for students and staff than what is currently measured.**

We outline recommendations to **shift from these actions being 'one off's' to becoming deeply embedded practices across the education sector,** with links to relevant resources. The eight actions we outline in this report represent critical areas for evaluation, to understand what works, for who and why. This can support investment and implementation of what works. There is also a need for networks and platforms to enable existing resources and learnings to be shared across the education sector *(e.g., Mentally Healthy Schools, Sustainability Support for Education, Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education).*

*"We do competitions about climate action with other schools. I think that's a really good way to **show young people that they can actually do things while also taking care of their mental health** because they are socializing, engaging, and they're getting to know more people that are interested in the same thing as them… I think [mental health] is an added benefit because the program was just about climate change."*

school | student

Pathways towards a collective vision:

Eight actions identified as most important and feasible by students and educators

actions

Connecting students with `nature`

Embedding `psychologically-informed CCE` into every subject

Support to cope with diverse `climate-emotions`

`Solutions-focussed, real-world` climate change education

`Future-focussed` skill development

Connecting with `climate action`

`Visible leadership` on climate action and emotional resilience

Resourcing and `educator support`

underpins all other actions...

vision

Mental health and wellbeing can flourish for all

Skills to navigate a changing future

Transformative climate action

Leadership for a systemic shift

Connecting with students `nature`

Nature connectedness benefits mental and physical health and wellbeing,[50] school attendance and attainment[51,52] and motivates positive environmental action.[53,54] CCE must centre nature connectedness.[55,56]

Our research found that in schools and colleges, only **18% of students** and **33% of educators** said that students are able to spend time, learn and take climate action with nature.

Where to start:

Explore opportunities for `learning outside the classroom` to enable young people to learn in and with nature, in accessible ways (e.g., 🔗 _National Education Nature Park_).

Where we can get to:

Education cultures and curricula meaningfully `embed a relational nature perspective` (i.e., that we are an interconnected part of nature and ecosystems).[57]

action in practice

"Our school doesn't have green space, so we have to take the kids somewhere. We've stitched together transport and it costs money. So one of the things we try to do is **encourage schools with green spaces to make them accessible to schools without green spaces,** and also getting our local council to work on an area that we can walk to that's accessible to all schools."

`school` `educator`

"**[Our environmental club] was fantastic.** Not only because we're outside in the sunshine and in nature is good for anxiety. But also because a lot of them, like me, didn't grow up in a gardening household. And so when you feel like, oh, I can plant trees, I can grow my own veggies. I can do that. It's empowering… **When people are active, they have different kinds of conversations than they do when they're sitting —** certainly in a lecture hall or at a table."

`university` `educator`

"The sustainability team have **outdoor activities like gardening and biodiversity monitoring.** These activities connect you with nature… It is very calming. **It brings you peace as well as understanding** of the environment. With biodiversity monitoring, they created a database where they regularly publish that information so they **make it like a game, a fun activity.** So you enjoy that."

`university` `student`

Embedding `psychologically-informed CCE` into every subject

Climate change must be built into every subject.[47,58-60]

This must embed **emotional resilience,**[36,59] **agency, and space for discussing challenging and complex topics** like political and economic systems and inequality.[47]

Where to start:

The **2025 Curriculum and Assessment review**[33] acknowledges the need for more climate content in the national curriculum, particularly in Science, Geography, Design & Technology and Citizenship. This provides **more entry points for climate content,** which can be built on to adopt this lens across existing content in all subjects.[60] **Existing resources and case studies** highlight how emotional resilience can be included in efforts to expand climate change education (e.g., _ThoughtBox Triple Wellbeing Curriculum, The Sustainables Academy_).

Where we can get to:

Holistic curriculums with climate change and emotional resilience woven into every subject. All students - no matter what they are studying - can make meaningful connections between their passions and the capacities required to thrive in a changing future.

action in practice

"At my school for year seven to nine, **every single subject will have modules about using climate change** in that subject. For textiles, we had to make things with sustainable fabric, in chemistry we were making recycled plastic. It can literally be implemented in every single subject at Key Stage 3, and I think it embeds it into the curriculum. I think it will be a lot more digestible for younger people, and work a lot better than having it in PSHE or as a [separate] subject. It also **helps you see all the practical applications of it instead of it being isolated."**

school | **student**

At **Dumpton School in Dorset,** learning about climate change, sustainability and nature is woven throughout the curriculum. Emotional literacy is the foundation for this whole school initiative; students explore climate-related emotions and build emotional resilience using the RULER (Recognise, Understand, Label, Express and Regulate) approach.

Climate Courage Schools Case Studies

Support to cope with diverse climate-emotions

Learning about climate change can bring up diverse strong emotions.[13] These can be rational, healthy responses and drive action.[15] But without support to validate, reflect and process these emotions, this can negatively impact mental health and wellbeing.[16,19]

Emotional resilience (including the skills for emotional regulation, learning to sit with uncertainty, building meaning, purpose) is not only important in the context of climate change, but for **strengthening youth mental health and wellbeing** more generally.[6,35]

Where to start:

Provide spaces, resources and tools for young people to discuss, validate, and acknowledge emotions related to climate change. Connect students and educators with existing resources and support.

E.g., *Mentally Healthy Schools Hub*, workshops like *Climate Cafes* and *Climate Fresk*, organisations like the *Resilience Project* and *Force of Nature.*

Where we can get to:

Cultures and hubs of community, care and belonging for both students and educators.[59] Collectively exploring and processing emotions is a foundation of CCE (enabled through training and resources for educators). This provides a way into discussions about diverse pressures on youth mental health, with signposting to mental health support where needed.

action in practice

*"It's been really interesting to see how much benefit our students get from just **talking to their peers** [from other departments]. … They can use that opportunity to talk about, within reason, whatever they want to talk about. So often they'll talk about [climate change] because we'll have assignment questions around sustainability. And they'll be talking about those assignment questions, but it gives them that opportunity to talk more in more detail. And we think that the **peer aspect has been really beneficial for them."***

university **educator**

*"I've been involved in facilitating **[climate cafes]**... It's been a really useful process for me… I've **taken some of that into my teaching** around sustainability and created moments when you're actually dealing with some of the really difficult content."*

university **educator**

Solutions-focussed, real-world climate change education

Focusing on real-world climate solutions, as well as problems, is essential to helping students to cope with distress and build hope and agency.[36] Framing in line with what is relevant and relatable to young people's own lives and interests can build agency while also helping to navigate disengagement with CCE.[48]

Where to start:

Find and share positive and diverse stories of action when discussing climate change, and connect climate change content to young people's own realities (e.g., *Reasons to be Hopeful, Climate Ambassadors*).

Where we can get to:

CCE supports students to hold both fear and hope, equipped with the skills to cope with a full spectrum of climate emotions, and act.[61] Students understand how climate change relates to their own lives, what they care about, and what they enjoy doing. They know what solutions and collective actions exist, and how they can play a part in creating the future they want to see.

action in practice

*"Previously, we used a particular case study all the way through [our course]. So we threw that one out and said to students, OK, you think about it… your own environment, issues that are important to you, and bring that into your project work…. **It was such a relief to bring the real world into the course.**"*

— *university* **educator**

*"Education must **shift from a fear driven narrative to one of agency/ empowerment...** This involves balancing scientific realities with a strong emphasis on solutions, collective action, while actively engaging students in real world problem solving and projects."*

— *school* **student**

*"During form time, we would just talk about things that have been going better and while I think it's important to stay aware of how bad it is… There's a lot of species that have been brought back from extinction, like a lot of efforts that are being made that are successful. I just think learning about that is actually quite inspiring because you can do similar things and it does help ease that, 'oh, it's pointless'. **Someone can do anything because things are actually being done that are helping.**"*

— *school* **student**

Future-focussed skill development

Diverse skills are needed to prepare young people for a changing future.[62]
**Many such skills align across what is needed for CCE, and to build emotional
resilience** e.g., sitting with uncertainty, empathy, compassion, systems thinking,
nature connectedness, community building, agency.[63]

Where to start:

The **2025 Curriculum and Assessment
Review** paves the way for a greater focus
on **life skills** and **applied knowledge**.
Alongside these **technical skills**, explore
emotional and social skills and connection
to **real world relevance**, young people's
futures and careers.

🔗 E.g., **_CLARITY Competency Framework
for Transformative Climate Resilience
Education_**

Where we can get to:

'Green skills' go beyond technical
understanding but also encompass
**emotional and social skills, resilience
and agency** needed to live, work and
thrive in a changing world.

action in practice

*"Across the board, as part of our school
development plan, has been a key focus on
oracy. So developing the students' oracy
skills to give them that empowerment not
only just to kind of take their ideas and
put them into action, but also to be able
to properly express their thoughts and
feelings as well, rather than keep them
bottled up."*

school educator

*"I think doing things such as
workshopswhere young individuals
can learn about taking action on
climate change, resilience, problem
solving. I think that encouraging
collaborative efforts helps students
feel more empowered rather than
being isolated."*

school student

Connecting with climate action

Taking part in climate action - particularly collective action - can support mental health and wellbeing, build hope and agency, and be an important coping strategy for strong climate-related emotions.[22,61]

Young people want these opportunities through their education.[16,29,30] However, engaging in **climate action can also be a risk to mental health and wellbeing when not accompanied by the skills and support** to avoid burnout and process a full spectrum of climate-related emotions.[16,23,64]

Where to start:

Make climate action accessible, practical and engaging. Equip students to think globally and act locally; connecting understandings of political and economic systems that constrain action with what can be achieved through local action. This can include student-led projects, real involvement of young people in decisions, connecting students with local community-led action.

🔗 e.g., _**Climate Majority Project Strategic Adaptation for Emergency Resilience**_

Where we can get to:

Education builds young people' skills, agency and practical knowledge of **climate action** and pro-environmental behaviours that also support mental health and wellbeing. Students and educators know how to get involved in action and feel confident to do so.

action in practice

"[We're] getting kids on panels, creating [climate action] visions for their schools, inviting the head teachers and saying, these are our visions, will you commit to what we're asking? There's something about the pressure of everyone being in the same room, and other headteachers going, yes, we will. It was really successful. **All the head teachers agreed to the visions. There was a collective feeling, the fear of missing out."**

school | educator

"[The university] introduced **a paid student-led position,** sustainability champions, where they encourage students to come up with their own projects related to climate action and environmental justice. A lot of events, career events, mental health events, more inclusive workshops around climate justice have cropped up because of this."

university | student

Visible leadership on climate action and emotional resilience

Feelings of betrayal and lack of visible action by leaders can worsen climate distress[13] and disengagement.[48]

Seeing leadership and action on climate change, and being able to meaningfully engage in that action, is important **to support students and educators to cope** with climate-related emotions,[61] feel part of collective action and community, and know how to get involved.[59]

Where to start:

Leadership teams communicating with students and staff about what sustainability, environmental and climate action is already happening, and including them in plans for future action.

🔗 e.g., **Planet & People, The Playful Activism Toolbox)**

Where we can get to:

Educational settings uphold **pro-environmental values, are transparent about their sustainability practices, and have a culture of leading by example and encouraging collective action.** The links between climate change, mental health and wellbeing are embedded in relevant policies (e.g., climate action plans, safeguarding, and health and safety).

action in practice

*"I think it'll be great if universities, when they did the induction or freshers week, spent an hour or two reflecting on sustainability that happens within the school. **I feel like that could teach a lot about climate change, but it could also ease a lot of climate anxiety.** It's teaching people about what the university is doing."*

university student

*"It's really important that universities **model sustainable behaviour - and communicate this.** Making it easy and accessible for **students to get involved** especially when they might be new to the city. In [my university] there is a student-run zero waste shop for example, and a member of staff who creates and updates a student / staff handbook of all the sustainability actions and services on and off campus."*

university educator

Resourcing and educator support

None of the other actions are possible without appropriate resourcing (such as time and funding) and support for educators.[59]

Where to start:

Explore how the **links between climate change and mental health can be integrated into existing training and education initiatives,** rather than being an add on.

Explore how **allocating more funding and time** to integrating emotional resilience and climate change can have multiple win-wins for safeguarding and promoting good mental health and wellbeing, preparing students for their futures, and sustainability action.

Where we can get to:

The links between climate change and mental health are understood and **prioritised in education policies, plans and training,** meaning win-win opportunities can be acted on and are properly resourced.

e.g., **Climate Staffroom** run by ClimatEdPsych, is an online peer support space for educators.

action in practice

*"We've recently started building in **training for our staff around emotional resilience,** not specifically for climate reasons. We have been offering it as part of a project for all staff to access. And really acknowledging their mental health has such a big impact on students' mental health."*

university **educator**

Examples

🔗 <u>**Climate Courage Schools**</u>

A national campaign calling for a system-wide shift in training, leadership and action on climate, nature and emotional resilience, and sharing case studies of schools already doing things differently.

🔗 <u>**Green Schools Revolution**</u>

Creating meaningful opportunities for students to green their secondary schools, leading Climate Action Plans, developing wilding plans and delivering teach the teacher sessions on climate education.

🔗 <u>**One Resilient Earth**</u>

Learning journeys, training programmes, retreats, and workshops, including an online climate resilience course for educators.

🔗 <u>**Force of Nature**</u>

Programmes to empower young people to create change, from climate cafes (safe and inclusive spaces to talk openly about climate change and translate feelings into action), to teacher training on climate anxiety.

🔗 <u>**Our City Our World**</u>

By developing an integrated environmental education curriculum, building nature connectedness, and empowering children and young people to become changemakers, this whole city approach aims to motivate action and create healthier, more socially-engaged communities in Brighton and Hove.

🔗 <u>**Good Life Schools**</u>

Supporting secondary schools to develop a whole school approach to sustainable action and improving wellbeing, led with students and in partnership with local community organisations.

Where to find support and resources

For educators:

🔗 **_Mentally Healthy Schools climate and mental health resources and teacher toolkit_**

🔗 **_Climate Adapted Pathways for Education_**

🔗 **_Climate Courage Schools_**

🔗 **_Climate Psychology Alliance support for educators, parents and carers_**

🔗 **_Climate Staffroom - Support Space for Educators_**

🔗 **_ClimatEdPsych_**

🔗 **_Earth Warriors Global_**

🔗 **_Force of Nature educator trainings and discussion guide_**

🔗 **_National Education Nature Park_**

🔗 **_Office for Climate Education_**

🔗 **_RULER approach to social and emotional learning_**

🔗 **_The Sustainables Academy_**

🔗 **_ThoughtBox Triple WellBeing_**

For young people:

🔗 **_Climate Psychology Alliance support for young people_**

🔗 **_Climate Youth Resilience_**

🔗 **_Force of Nature_**

🔗 **_Reasons to be Hopeful_**

🔗 **_The Resilience Project_**

For everyone:

🔗 **_Climate Mental Health Network_**

🔗 **_Climate Shift_**

🔗 **_One Resilient Earth_**

🔗 **_Our Youth For The Climate_**

Recommendations

Moving from 'one-off' actions to a system-wide shift

Collective action and investment across the education system is needed to shift from these success stories being 'one off's' to becoming deeply embedded practices across the whole education sector.

In our research, **students and educators saw the government as most responsible for driving change** (82% of 16–29-year-olds and 73% of school, college and university educators), followed by senior leadership teams (64% students; 78% educators), educators (61% students; 64% educators) and students (60% students; 54% educators).

Putting these actions into practice will **look different across educational settings,** and requires centering students and educators in decision making about what their own shared vision of success looks like, and building on from what action is already happening, in their school, college, university or community.

In this section, we set out our recommendations for collective action.

Government:

Curriculum and assessment reform

■ Recognise the links between climate change, mental health and wellbeing as **critical for preparing young people for life and careers in a changing world.** Embed emotional resilience as a foundation for climate change education that can promote youth mental health and wellbeing, across subjects (DfE)

Educator training and professional development

■ **Integrate climate change and emotional resilience** into all stages of educator education and training and development, for all subjects (DfE). E.g., National Professional Qualifications, initial teacher training, and leadership training reviews.

Skills for life, work and a green economy

■ Position **emotional resilience, agency, systems thinking as core skills** - for life and work, for thriving in a changing world, and for tackling the challenges facing our planet[7] (DfE, DESNZ, DCMS).

Whole-school, college and university approaches to mental health and wellbeing

■ Integrate **climate change-related considerations into guidance, support and resourcing** for mental health and wellbeing (DfE, DHSC, NHS England, OfS), e.g.:

  ○ Senior Mental Health Leads
  ○ Mental Health Support Teams
  ○ Whole school/college/university approaches to mental health and wellbeing
  ○ Safeguarding frameworks

Climate and sustainability leadership, strategies and plans

■ Integrate **emotional resilience into climate change and sustainability guidance and funding** (DfE), e.g.:

  ○ Sustainability Leads (including partnering with Senior Mental Health Leads)
  ○ Climate action plans
  ○ The upcoming Climate and Sustainability Strategy refresh

Building belonging, community and opportunity

■ Recognise and embed **support for managing climate distress** and disengagement, increasing nature connectedness and fostering collective climate action as contributors to belonging, attendance and attainment[7] (DfE).

■ Recognise participation in **local climate adaptation as an opportunity for young people** to build skills, agency and purpose, connect with nature, engage with their communities, and promote wellbeing. Integrate this into relevant strategies (e.g., DCMS National Youth Strategy[8]).

Youth engagement

■ Integrate climate change education and emotional resilience in **existing and planned youth engagement and collaboration,** e.g., the Energising Britain Youth Climate and Nature Panel[65] (DESNZ, DfE, DCMS).

Evidence and evaluation

■ Work across relevant departments to:

  ○ Embed the links between climate change education, mental health and wellbeing into cost-benefit analyses, to **support decision making that achieves co-benefits** and prevents unintended harms.
  ○ Embed the impacts of climate change on mental health and wellbeing into **routine monitoring of youth mental health.**

■ Work with education settings and research teams to **identify and evaluate existing initiatives.** This can make co-benefits known and measurable, and ensure effective interventions can be scaled and adapted.

■ **Support researchers to build evidence that can drive action.** E.g., integrated approaches to emotional resilience and climate change education as an opportunity for mental health promotion and prevention.[38]

Schools, colleges and universities:

- Join or create **communities of practice to share and learn** about what works across education settings and explore how these can be embedded into their own settings. Such communities can also provide peer support for educators.

- Dedicate **time for emotional resilience-building** and for acknowledging and processing climate-emotions, for both staff and students (enabled through support provided by government and by organisations working with the education sector).

- Prioritise **Continuing Professional Development on climate change,** the environment, and emotional resilience.

- Engage with their **local community in the development and implementation of climate action plans.**

Young people:

- **Use their unique experiences, skills, knowledge and expertise** to create change in their schools, colleges, universities, local communities and government – supported by these institutions creating meaningful opportunities to listen and learn from young people.

Organisations working with the education system (e.g., community-based organisations, charities, advocacy organisations):

- Connect across education, health and other relevant sectors to **identify win-win opportunities for climate change education and supporting youth mental health and wellbeing,** so that what works can be identified, shared, scaled and adapted across education settings.

- **Amplify existing resources, interventions and learnings** through relevant networks and platforms to enable these be shared across the education sector and to connect government, schools, colleges and universities with examples of what works.

- **Collaborate with each other and across the education system** to share learnings, resources, and access funding.

Researchers:

- **Partner with schools, colleges, universities, education organisations and mental health organisations** who are already putting this work into practice, to evaluate what works, for whom and why.

- Work with government to **understand and respond to the evidence gaps** currently holding back investment, and to **translate existing evidence into policy and practice.**

- **Prioritise co-design** with students, educators and policymakers in research.

- **Research funders** need to make more resources available to enable this evidence building.

Achieving impact through the Compass Project

Throughout the Compass Project process, we sought to put what we heard is needed into practice.

Creating space to **explore emotional responses to learning about climate change** was identified as a priority action to drive change in education, and was core to many of the examples of what works.

Participants in the **group discussions and co-design workshops** reflected on the value of having a shared space for connection, sharing, and validation of climate-related emotions and experiences. Young people shared how being part of the project felt like a meaningful way to get involved in climate action, and for their voices to be heard. Educators highlighted the value of being able to learn from their peers.

"I'm feeling inspired because… I certainly get into the habit of the day job and the same routine. But hearing the sorts of things that other people are up to is definitely quite inspiring to broaden my own personal horizons, not only on a personal note, but also as a classroom teacher. I was taking notes of the sort of things that other people are up to try and embed them in my school as well."

school teacher group discussion participant

Group discussion participants were **able to choose whether they wanted to be in youth or educator-only groups, or intergenerational groups.**

Interest was overwhelmingly for the intergenerational groups, highlighting the importance of creating spaces where students and educators can share with each other and learn together.

"This project feels like a giant speakerphone...

...it's actually listening to young people and then going to the government...

...Normally this gets talked about once and then never again...

...knowing there are people we, as young people, can go to for our voices to be heard is really nice."

co-design youth workshop participant

Group discussion participants shared how they felt at the start and end of the 1.5 hour discussion.

Feelings tended to shift towards connection and action…

start

rested
anxious   positive
fine   impostery   hopeful
intrigued   calm
tired   argh!
interested   grateful
happy   curious
relieved   energised
optimistic   excited
relaxed   inquisitive   enthusiastic
manic

end

heard   motivated
calm   inspired
impressed   learned
empowered
stressed   interested   grateful   balanced
community   connected
fascinated
curious   happy   elation   cheerful   engaged
good   frustrated
hopeful   reassured
informed   positive
confident   excited   tired
solidarity   energised   relieved
optimistic

We also sought to **support youth and educator advisors to build skills** they told us they wanted. Youth advisors were provided with Force of Nature facilitation training, led workshops, and presented to large audiences.

Educator advisors also reported **feeling more confident to have conversations** with students about climate change and mental health.

*"Involving young people and enabling them to **lead initiatives, teach and empower others** seems to be a really powerful way to support our mental health and climate action... In this project, being part of the analysis and facilitating has been an amazing way to develop my skills and learn from others, as well as (hopefully) contribute to positive change."*

youth advisor

5

Summary

This report represents the voices of 200+ students, aged 16-29, and educators in schools, sixth form and further education colleges, and universities in England, co-created with youth and educator advisors and a network of sector experts.

Currently, climate change education risks exacerbating both climate distress and disengagement, and disempowering both students and educators. While there is increasing inclusion of climate change across diverse subjects and activities in education in ways that build emotional resilience, what is **lacking is a vision of how to embed this into cultures and curricula.**

Through this research, students and educators shared a **collective vision** of a future of education that empowers every student and educator with the knowledge, skills, agency and resilience needed to live, work and thrive in a rapidly changing world. **Clear pathways towards this vision exist,** such as connecting students with nature, curriculum reform, providing support to cope with diverse climate-emotions, and educator training. **Evaluation, investment and collective cross-sector action is needed** to scale and adapt effective interventions, and shift from 'one off' actions to embedded practices across the education system. Work to understand co-beneficial outcomes of climate change education initiatives that integrate emotional resilience (e.g., for improving educational outcomes, for mental health promotion and prevention, for enabling climate action) can support effective investment and impactful action.

Now is a **critical moment** to put emotional resilience at the heart of climate change education.

In the UK, young people are facing a growing mental health crisis, and will need to navigate the escalating threat of climate change throughout their lifetimes. By taking an integrated approach, education can better support all young people to navigate diverse climate change-related emotions and experiences, build and sustain strong mental health and purpose in an uncertain world, and imagine the transformed future they want to be part of creating.

Contributors

The Compass Project is led by the Climate Cares Centre (Imperial College London & the University of Oxford) in partnership with Anna Freud, Force of Nature, the Compass Youth Advisory Board, Educators Advisory Board, and global working group.

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Project Team

Jessica Newberry Le Vay, Compass Project Lead, Climate Cares Centre, University of Oxford and Imperial College London

Dr Emma Lawrance, Climate Cares Centre Lead, University of Oxford and Imperial College London

Pip Batey, Pip Robyn Design (freelancer)

Sacha Wright, University College London & Force of Nature

Natalie Merrett, Anna Freud

Tara Yarahmadi-Smith, Anna Freud

Teaghan Hogg, University of Canberra

Professor Mina Fazel, University of Oxford

Youth Advisory Board

Simrika Amatya, Student at Imperial College London

Jack Cooper, Student at the University of Sussex & Founder of Postcode Revolution

Morag Hewett, Student at the University of Leeds

Clarice Hobrow, Student at the University of Sheffield

Jasmine Joseph, A Level Student

Anton Poon, A Level Student

Julia Römer, PhD student at The Glasgow School of Art

Educators Advisory Board

Dr Michael Albert, University of Edinburgh

Francesca Baur, Woodsell and Rochester Independent College

Shriya Dayal, University College London

Chiyasmi Devi, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society

Tyler Garton, London Academy of Excellence Tottenham

Dr Noel Longhurst, University of East Anglia

John Meredith, Diocese of Swansea and Brecon

Kit Marie Rackley, University of East Anglia & Climate Ambassadors East of England

Working Group

Members attended project meetings, advised project strategy, provided feedback, and took part in global community building and knowledge sharing.

Shweta Bahri, Earth Warriors Global

Carolyn Bishop, British Science Association

Badin Borde, Siemens Foundation

Heena Dave, Climate Adapted Pathways for Education

Dr Larissa Dooley, Climate Mental Health Network

Dr Louise Edgington, ClimateEdPsych

Les Gunbie, Climate Majority Project

Professor Leigh Hoath, Climate Adapted Pathways for Education

Matt Hughsam, citiesRISE

Dr Michalis Kakos, Leeds Beckett University

Dr Cathy-May Karelse, Climate Youth Resilience

Greg Klerkx, Climate Shift

Simon Klein, Office for Climate Education

Ava Langridge, Our Youth 4 The Climate

Josephine Lethbridge, Climate Majority Project

Dr Gareth Morgan, Climate Psychology Alliance

Jane Taylor Rahman, Reasons to be Hopeful

Louise Robertson, The Sustainables Academy

Laureline Simon, One Resilient Earth

Lauren Uba, Climate Youth Resilience

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6 Appendix

Group discussions

Six online group discussions were held between February-March 2025, with a total 46 participants (32 students and 14 educators).

Structure: Group discussion structure and content was co-designed with youth and educator advisors. Participants were offered the choice to join one of six group discussions, each with a maximum of 12. This included separate spaces for 1) young people in schools and colleges, 2) young people in universities, 3) educators in schools and colleges and 4) educators in universities. We also heard a strong desire from project advisors for intergenerational discussion spaces, so we set up two mixed groups with: 1) both staff and students in schools and colleges, and 2) both staff and students in universities.

Content: Discussion guides were tailored for each group. Questions focused on what participants thought:

- Currently works well to support mental health and wellbeing when learning/teaching about climate change, and where learning or talking about climate change can be helpful for mental health skills more widely
- Needs to change about how young people learn about climate change, so that they are supported to build good mental health and wellbeing and feel confident, informed and ready to take climate action
- What can happen in schools, colleges and universities to create the change they want to see
- The barriers are to bringing mental health and wellbeing into teaching about climate change, or bringing climate change into conversations about mental health.

Facilitation: All group discussions were facilitated by the youth and educator advisors. Force of Nature - experts in training youth facilitators - provided training and support to youth facilitators and provided input into focus group design.

Safeguarding: A psychotherapist and one of the working group members (Jane Taylor Rahman) joined every group discussion and offered a separate breakout space to anyone required support. Jane offered a free 1-1 therapy session to all participants following the focus groups. Signposting to supportive online resources was provided to all participants.

Participants: Participants were recruited through the project team (including working group and advisor) networks and social media platforms. School and college participants were recruited by Anna Freud via their educator networks. We had overwhelmingly positive interest in taking part in the group discussions (over 100 people), reflecting the desire for connection and safe spaces to explore climate-related emotions and education experiences. We noted a strong preference for being part of the mixed student-educator groups from both young people and educators. Participants completed an expression of interest form and were selected based on ensuring representation (e.g., geography, age, gender). All participants were compensated (£25 per hour).

Feedback: An anonymous online feedback survey was completed by participants following the group discussions. Facilitators were also asked to provide feedback on their experience of co-designing and facilitating the discussions via email or an anonymous online feedback survey.

Analysis: Group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were thematically analysed using a combined deductive and inductive approach. Deductive high-level categories were based on the research questions (current experiences of integrating mental health and wellbeing into CCE; what does good look like; opportunities for enacting change; barriers to enacting change). Inductive categories were developed within these high-level categories. Youth and educator advisors provided input on coding framework development.

Online Survey

An online survey was completed by 200 students and educators in England between June-October 2025.

Content: Survey questions were developed through consultation with the advisory groups and project working group, grounded in the insights generated through the group discussions. The survey had tailored questions for students and educators. Survey questions explored experiences of teaching/learning about climate change, including emotional responses. Participants were provided with a list of core components of successful integration of climate change education and mental health and asked to indicate what they already experienced in their education setting, and what they most wanted to see happen. Participants were provided a list of actions heard through the group discussions and asked to indicate the most a) important and b) practicality possible ways that education can protect young people's mental health and prepare them for a future in a changing climate. Participants were also asked to indicate top barriers, and what already works well. Survey questions were tested with youth and educator advisors for clarity and audience appropriateness. Participants were entered into a prize draw to win vouchers of up to £50 redeemable at a range of outlets.

Safeguarding: Signposting to supportive online resources was provided to all participants in participant information sheets and on completion of the survey.

Participants: Participants were recruited through existing networks and social media channels of the Climate Cares Centre, expert working group members and advisory group members. School and college participants were recruited by Anna Freud via their educator networks. Creative and engaging approaches to survey recruitment included a video recorded by a youth advisor and artwork shared by a focus group participant.

Analysis: Anonymised data was quantitatively analysed to produce descriptive statistics. Qualitative responses were thematically analysed.

Participants

A total of 256* responses from students and educators were included in the research (46 group discussion participants, 210 survey participants). Recruitment sought to be representative of the population in England (Table 1).

Demographic		Percentage of **group discussion** participants (%)	Percentage of **survey** participants (%)
Region	North East England	4	2
	North West England	11	2
	Yorkshire	20	6
	East Midlands	2	1
	West Midlands	9	2
	East of England	0	3
	London	15	20
	South East England	20	15
	South West England	20	5
Age (young people)	16-17	26	30
	18-20	20	17
	21-24	9	12
	25-29	17	5
Age (educators)	Below 35	2	N/A
	36-49	15	N/A
	50+	9	N/A
	Not specified	2	N/A
Gender*	Female	67	36
	Male	28	16
	Non binary	2	2
	Not specified	2	46
Ethnicity*	Asian	11	8
	Black	13	1
	Mixed	7	2
	White	59	34
	Not specified	N/A	48

*Demographic questions were optional for survey participants, with the exception of region (for all participants) and age (for student participants). Participants were asked what gender and ethnicity they identify as, with an open text response. Categorisations are based on the open text responses.

Table 1: Group discussion and survey participant details