

Dr Keir Bloomer, Chairperson

By email to: IndependentReview@education-ni.gov.uk

December 2022

Dear Keir,

RE: Response to the Interim Report of the Independent Review Of Education In Northern Ireland.

We are writing to you on behalf of Teach the Future Northern Ireland and Friends of the Earth Northern Ireland. Teach the Future Northern Ireland is a student-led climate action campaign advocating for the inclusion of climate education and the ecological crisis in the curriculum at all levels of the Northern Irish Education system. The campaign is supported by Friends of the Earth NI, which is part of an international community dedicated to protecting the natural world and the wellbeing of everyone in it.

We were keenly awaiting the publication of your Interim Report on the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland. However, we were disappointed to learn that the 44-page review failed to mention climate change, climate education, the environment, or nature. Given that we are in a climate emergency and ecological crisis, it is extremely concerning to us that the NI Executive, and the Panel conducting this review, do not consider the joint crises to be important or relevant enough to be included in the interim report.

We are calling for The Executive and the Panel undertaking the review to include climate education as a 'priority area' in the final report. Climate change is one of the most significant issues facing us globally thus it is imperative that the magnitude of this problem is represented in the national curriculum. Young people face uncertainty and anxiety for their future because of climate change. Young people are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, therefore, must be adequately educated on these issues .

An examination of your 'Survey Analysis' report revealed that 17% of the 1,234 survey respondents indicated they felt 'ensuring education plays a role in increasing awareness of climate change' was a 'priority area' of the report.

This is a substantial proportion of those surveyed. However, it is not representative of the student demand for climate education across the UK. Based on [research](#) carried out by the Royal Meteorological Society in September 2022, 6 in 10 students feel very or fairly concerned about climate change. Furthermore, SOS-UK [research](#) shows that 70% of UK teachers feel they have not received adequate training to educate students on climate change, its implications for the environment and societies around the world, and how these implications can be addressed.

The importance of comprehensive global climate education has been reinforced internationally over the past few years, through UNESCO's work at COP26 and COP27. During COP26, at the Youth and Public Empowerment Day, the UK Department of Education, UNESCO, and the Italian Government gathered to discuss the integration of climate change and sustainable development into the curriculum. Over 25 countries pledged to improve climate education. We would love to see Northern Ireland fulfilling this pledge.

Furthermore, [UNESCO](#) has called for an enhanced global commitment to improving climate education - their research shows that just half of the world's national education curricula make any reference to climate change. As students of the Northern Irish education system, we believe it is vital for our country to provide comprehensive climate education and want to see Northern Ireland leading the way on this.

We also see the other devolved nations making great strides on this agenda - Scotland with [Learning for Sustainability](#) commitments, Wales with the [Future Generations Act](#) and England with the Department for Education's [Sustainability and climate change strategy](#).

We would be delighted to meet with the review Panel prior to the publication of the Final Report to discuss how climate education can be included as a 'priority area'.

Thank you for giving this matter your attention, we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Grace Cooper

Teach the Future Northern Ireland, Volunteer Coordinator, 24 years old.

Katie O'Donnell

Teach the Future Volunteer, 24 years old.

and

James Orr

Northern Ireland Director, Friends of the Earth.