CLIMATE AMBASSADORS

Phase 1 Impact Evaluation

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STEM LEARNING

University of Reading

Contents

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Summary

This Phase 1 Impact and Evaluation Report presents the national findings from the Climate Ambassadors programme following its launch in September 2024, establishing the first comprehensive baseline from which future progress will be measured.

This report sits alongside the end of Phase 1 highlights report, published in December 2025 using data drawn from the digital infrastructure underpinning the programme (developed and maintained by STEM Learning), which also provides the mechanism for our ongoing reach KPI measurement. Published as part of the celebrations marking the conclusion of Phase 1, that earlier report offered a high-level overview of progress to date. In contrast, this impact evaluation report provides a more technical 'deep dive' that combines multiple datasets and analyses both the progress made by education settings and the experiences of volunteers involved in the programme.

Drawing on mixed method data from the Reach–Engage–Act framework, Climate Action Tracker and Climate Ambassador Feedback Form, the report assesses the extent to which education settings are developing and implementing climate action plans (CAPs) across the four pillars suggested by the Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy: decarbonisation, adaptation and resilience, biodiversity, and climate education, green skills and careers.

Results show strong engagement, with 73% of settings actively seeking support and 71% reporting progress on CAP development; however, while settings have ambitions to produce a holistic CAP, most remain in the early stages, with only 56% demonstrating action across all four pillars.

Key barriers include funding and cost constraints, limited staff capacity, governance and procedural delays, and variability in data quality, issues compounded by operational challenges and aging infrastructure.

Leadership commitment is strong, with 78% of settings having a Sustainability Lead, yet institutional processes such as policy integration and CAP sign-off remain inconsistent. Climate Ambassadors report high confidence levels but highlight the need for improved resources and opportunities for peer collaboration.

Collectively, the findings indicate a motivated sector constrained by structural, financial and capacity-related limitations. The report concludes with targeted recommendations to strengthen clarity, governance, funding, staff capability, Climate Ambassador support systems and national monitoring frameworks - measures essential for accelerating whole setting climate action and achieving long-term, system-wide transformation.

1 Introduction

The UK Government has set out an ambition for the UK to be world leading in sustainability and climate change education by 2030, as outlined in the Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy (2022). This sits alongside three national missions: breaking down barriers to opportunity, economic growth and clean energy. Education is recognised as a central contributor and enabler of long-term social and environmental goals.

Spanning early years to further education, where schools and colleges alone equate to more than 22,000 settings[1], the education sector in England plays a dual role. It contributes to national emissions while also offering significant potential to support climate mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity recovery and inspiring learners for a more sustainable future.

National climate commitments stipulate that the UK reach net zero by 2050, with interim reductions of 50% by 2032 and 75% by 2037[2]. Within this context, education settings play an important part in the wider decarbonisation effort. Data from the National Audit Office (2022)[3] has reported that education in England account for 37% of public-sector building emissions: 13% from primary schools, 11% from secondary schools, and 13% from universities.

Alongside carbon reduction, wider environmental considerations also extend to nature recovery. The UK is among the most nature-depleted countries globally, having experienced a decline of nearly 50% in biodiversity since 1970, with almost one in six species currently threatened with extinction[4]. Education settings in England collectively occupy an area larger than the combined size of Birmingham, Sheffield and Newcastle, offering opportunities for climate education, habitat restoration and biodiversity improvement.

Climate change is expected to have increasing impacts on education settings in the coming decades. Studies indicate that pupils in England may experience interruptions to learning as a result of rising temperatures and extreme weather. By 2050, heat levels are projected to lead to the equivalent of more than eight days of lost learning annually unless adaptations such as improved ventilation are implemented. Flood risk also affects a notable proportion of school buildings, with more than one in three secondary schools and one in five primary schools identified as being at heightened risk from surface, river or coastal flooding. Longer term projections suggest that, without adaptation, students may experience further disruption due to generally warmer temperatures throughout the school year.[5]

Interest in climate change education is strong among both young people and educators. Surveys show that 72% of UK 14 to 18-year-old would like to learn more about climate change in school, and 68% believe that climate education should be included across all subjects[6]. However, 70% of respondents said they felt poorly prepared to face the challenges of climate change, based on what they have learned in school[7]. Teachers similarly identify the importance of climate education, with 95% reporting that it is extremely important, although fewer than 30% feel fully prepared to teach it.[8] Similar data exists for further education as well.[9; 10]

In response, the Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy set out the policy expectation that "by 2025, all education settings will have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan" covering four key pillars:

Adaptation and Resilience – Ensure that infrastructure, systems and students are prepared for the effects and impacts of climate change.

Biodiversity – A better environment for current and future generations with improved air quality, biodiversity and access to nature.

Climate Education and Green Careers – Delivering excellence in education that delivers knowledge and skills to young people for a changing world.

Decarbonisation – Reducing Scope 1, 2 & 3 emissions and providing opportunities for young people to participate in the transition to net zero.

There are three Department for Education-funded initiatives, supporting the education in England to address sustainability, climate change and nature, which form the Sustainability Support Programme: National Education Nature Park, Sustainability Support for Education, and Climate Ambassadors. The Climate Ambassadors programme is designed to enable early years settings, schools and colleges to work with volunteers to develop impactful CAPs.

This report presents the national findings from Phase 1 of the scheme, following its launch in September 2024, and establishes a baseline for evaluating future progress.

2 The Climate Ambassadors Programme

The Climate Ambassadors scheme provides free expertise and support to early years settings, schools and colleges to develop and deliver impactful climate action plans (CAPs).

The scheme is delivered by a consortium of 15 organisations[11] who work in partnership to help recruit and support volunteers who enable education settings to take action to become more environmentally sustainable and climate resilient, and to better prepare young people to live in a world with a changing climate.

The eight university partners and the Met Office[12], who host the scheme's nine regional Hubs, are led by a senior member of staff with expertise in sustainability and climate, and each employ a Regional Hub Manager that connects a diverse network of volunteer Climate Ambassadors with education settings. Each hub works to support education settings to develop and implement a whole institution approach to climate action planning by brokering relationships with trained volunteer Climate Ambassadors who provide specialist guidance and additional staff support, aiding the development of peer-to-peer networks and promoting climate action at a local level.

The Hubs are coordinated and supported by a national team that provide the digital infrastructure, training and structures to make the programme work as a whole, including national outreach and partnership development. The programme sits alongside the other DfE Sustainability Support Programme initiatives, delivering a broad ecosystem of support for settings.

The development and delivery of achievable, high-quality and impactful CAPs will enable education settings to contribute to net zero targets, improve their resilience to the effects of climate change, reduce their negative impacts and maximise their positive impacts on the environment. They will also ensure learners are exposed to and benefit from climate and sustainability education and skills development, helping them contribute to national and global sustainability goals as well as equipping them for adult life and green careers.

Our vision centres on what success looks like within the early years settings, schools and colleges involved, with the understanding that education settings are at varying points in their journey and success will look different for each of them.

The aim is for a whole-setting approach to be embraced, where CAPs form a part of a setting's development plan. CAPs should be robust, evolving, 'living' documents with SMART targets and clear milestones, addressing all four pillars of the DfE Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy. They may include incremental steps towards ultimate goals, with smaller scale actions being considered successes too.

For education providers, the most successful cases are considered to be those where climate action is embedded into their strategy, ethos and culture, and climate action is seen as 'business as usual'. This is more likely to lead to students feeling empowered with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours necessary to become agents of change, and to staff developing a solid understanding of the journey they need to make towards sustainability, equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement changes, knowing where to access support when needed.

We understand that there are many cogs in the wheel that need to connect effectively to support settings along the way and Climate Ambassadors have a key role to play. Support for education settings is crucial and requires a strong and growing network of well-trained, well-supported Climate Ambassadors, with a diverse range of experience and backgrounds including business, industry, education, charities, community organisations and local authorities.

We seek to establish an environment where institutions, young people and communities work together to create a sense of belonging while considering the needs of present and future generations.

Climate Ambassadors Map

Funded by

Department for Education

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Digital Infrastructure

STEM LEARNING

Training and Mentoring

Change Agents UK

Engagement

hopscotch
A WE Communications Company

Regional Hubs

- Nottingham Trent University
- University of Nottingham UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA
- Newcastle University
- University of Leeds
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Keele University
- University of East Anglia
- University of Reading
- UWE Bristol
- UCL

Sister projects

- National Education Nature Park
- Sustainability Support for Education
- Let's Go Zero 2030 Climate Action Advisors

3 Our Approach to Impact and Evaluation

Evaluation of the Climate Ambassadors scheme is underpinned by an impact evaluation plan, aligned with a Theory of Change framework stemming from the Department for Education KPIs for the project[13]. KPIs in themselves help to establish the reach of the project but on their own cannot determine how effectively the project is delivering change based on our Theory of Change framework. From the outset of the project, the Met Office team had the responsibility to develop a more detailed set of measures of impact which are reported here.

Our Theory of Change outlines how success of the project relies on establishing a support system that motivates and enables education settings to **create impactful CAPs** and advance their capacity and agency to **act on these plans.**

The impact evaluation plan has been informed by consortium partner consultations which took place over the course of planned residential conventions and a series of Regional Hub Leader and Regional Hub Manager focus group meetings. Discussions included consideration of success criteria, impact criteria, method design, means of data collection, limitations, challenges and risks. The outcomes form the basis of the methodology adopted and are captured below.

3.1 Impact Evaluation Plan: Scope, Goals and Criteria

Eight impact evaluation focus themes emerged from these discussions:

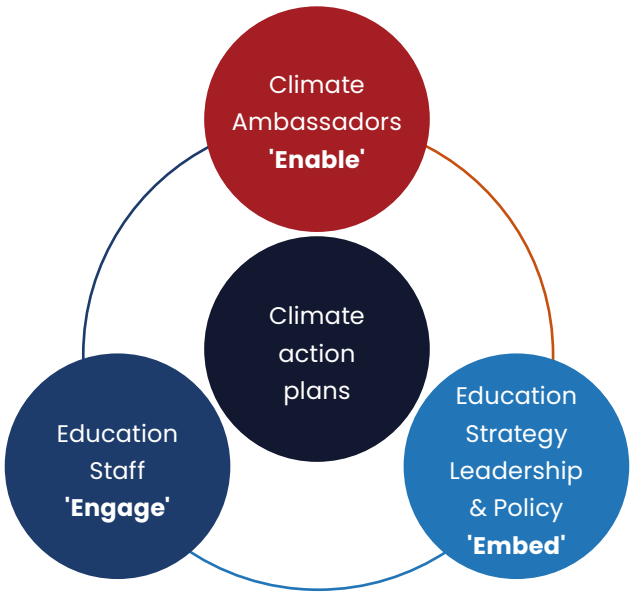
1. Climate action plans
2. Climate Ambassadors
3. Education settings
4. Education setting staff
5. Young people and learners
6. The broader education sector
7. Wider society
8. Climate Ambassador activities – quality assurance and progression

The first six themes reflect outcomes and impacts captured within the Theory of Change framework as critical to the success of the project (see Figure 1 and Appendix 1). An overview of the criteria for each of these focus areas is given in the relevant sections below.

While all eight themes are important to consider, the scale and duration of the project does not allow sufficient time to evaluate impacts on young people, the education sector as a whole, wider society or the quality of Climate Ambassador activities through our impact evaluation work. Therefore, the impact evaluation plan detailed within this document focuses on Climate Ambassadors, education settings, CAPs and education setting staff.

By being transparent about the potential for further impact assessment, spanning themes 5-8, we are laying the foundation for future impact assessments whilst working within our current resourcing capacity.

Figure 1 *The Three E's of Climate Ambassador Impact*



3.2 Methods

To allow for a robust impact assessment, a mixed method approach has been used. Our main data sources are outlined below with additional data collected via the STEM Learning platform (which Ambassadors and education settings use to register and coordinate their activity) and Change Agents UK (who provide the mandatory and optional training for volunteers) for Climate Ambassador data while case studies will be used to enrich the findings.

3.3 Reach – Engage – Act

Reach-Engage-Act is a framework used by regional Hubs to track education settings' progress in their region. This supports the impact evaluation in the early stages of the programme, in the first instance, and also helps support and inform outreach and communications. Recognising each education setting is working at their own pace, they are categorised as being at "reach", "engage" or "act".

Figure 2 *Reach – Engage – Act Descriptors*

Reach

Initial touch point where the setting finds out about the programme.

Engage

Decision makers within the setting have an understanding of the steps required to develop a CAP, are aware of support available to them, and are considering the next steps to take.

Act

The education setting develops a CAP which is refined and delivered over time.

3.4 Climate Action Tracker (CAT)

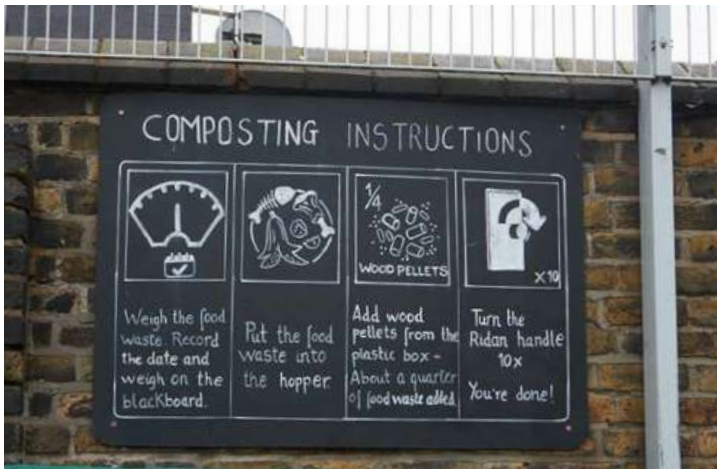
The Climate Action Tracker was developed based on the Careers and Enterprise Company Compass Reports. It is used to extract granular data that can determine the extent to which climate action is embedded in the leadership of settings as well as the extent to which educators feel confident in their ability to deliver climate education in their respective subject areas. It is only when settings are in the 'engage' or 'act' categories that they complete the Climate Action Tracker.

3.5 Climate Ambassador Feedback Form (CAFF)

The Climate Ambassador Feedback Form is designed to monitor whether Climate Ambassadors (CAs) feel adequately trained and prepared to support settings in their journey, that they feel empowered to work with settings and able to adapt to settings' needs. In addition, it monitors whether the CA feels their work contributes to their own and their organisation's (where they are employed) sustainability development, and tracks areas of expertise, the activities that they are involved in and the extent to which that has influenced change.

3.6 Case Studies

Case studies are collected and designed to add an additional qualitative element to the impact evaluation and provide a rich story about the programme. These also allow any unintended outcomes or benefits to be highlighted. The full suite of case studies published to date can be found on the Climate Ambassadors website.



3.7 Limitations, Challenges and Risks

A series of limitations, challenges and risks were identified as part of the initial methodology and are outlined below.

Limitations

- No control group for comparison
- What can realistically be measured within the time available

Challenges

- Competing priorities in education settings, of which climate action may not be one, which may limit the reporting that settings complete
- Some settings may be more difficult to engage for a variety of reasons, which would skew evaluation results towards settings that are more engaged

Risks

- Potential for double counting between sister projects as a result of different data sets held
- Potential for non-Climate Ambassador scheme activity to be counted as scheme activity
- Potential for Climate Ambassador scheme activity to be missed
- Not enough Climate Ambassadors to meet demand and, therefore, enable analysis

In addition to the risks identified at the start of the project, other risks have presented themselves which pose limitations on the results for Phase 1.

- Incomplete regional data: the results do not include any data from the North East due to a gap in employing a Regional Hub Manager in this region. This limits the representativeness of regional and national findings and influences how national trends are interpreted when results are aggregated across all regions.
- Delayed implementation of core tools: the Climate Action Tracker (CAT) and Climate Ambassador Feedback Form (CAFF) were not fully in use from the start of Phase 1, reducing the amount and consistency of early state data, introducing potential inconsistencies in longitudinal analysis.
- Inconsistent survey completeness: A number of fields contain no response, such as those in specific pillars, likely due to early stages of the climate action planning process.

The limitations, challenges and risks have been experienced to varying degrees across regions but are being managed through the project's governance and management structures at both regional and national levels.

As data tools become fully embedded and used consistently, many of the issues observed in Phase 1 are anticipated to disappear. This will support more complete and accurate data collection, enabling clearer trend identification and more robust assessment of progress over time.

4 Results – Education Setting Outreach and Progress

Section 1 looks at education settings' progress against different levels of impact using R-E-A and CAT responses between September 2024 and December 2025.

Section 2 looks at CAP development against the four pillars (adaptation, biodiversity, climate education and skills and decarbonisation), examining the degree that actions are defined, structured and actionable, the variety of actions taken, and the challenges encountered.

Section 3 looks at Leadership and Governance, whether there is a Sustainability Lead in place and the degree to which climate action is embedded into 'business as usual'.

Section 4 looks at staff capacity to deliver on CAPs while **Section 5** looks at Climate Ambassadors.

Response Rates

Data has been collected from the official launch of the programme in September 2024 through to December 2025, marking the end of Phase 1 and establishes a baseline for evaluating future progress.

There are 547 CAT responses from 2962 settings currently at 'engage' or 'act' with a response rate of 18.47%. The high level of 'no response' in the returned surveys likely reflects early stage climate action planning and uncertainty among respondents. We wouldn't expect all of our settings to return responses, but we judge both the absolute number of responses and the percentage completing the CAT to be representative of the programme and so useful for our impact reporting.

The responses from the Climate Ambassador Feedback Form and the Change Agents UK feedback forms were combined with duplicates taken out to create a data set of 553 responses.

> "I found it very interesting, specifically to meet everyone working in sustainability and hear about their individual roles, as before that I wasn't sure what roles there were in the field."
>
> **Student attending the BIFoR Future Forests Summit**

> "Our school development plan this year focused on green themes and our curriculum weaves in our next climate action targets. Even our allotment is written into the curriculum."
>
> **Headteacher, Cippenham Nursery School**

> "The Climate Ambassadors programme is brilliant. Our team have found the experience very rewarding and fulfilling, giving us the chance to give back to our communities and learn about the difficulties that our education sector is facing in implementing key aspects of sustainability."
>
> **Head of Sustainability & Decarbonisation, BTG Eddisons**

4.1 Settings' Levels of Impact

Different levels of impact have been measured through 'Reach – Engage – Act' (R-E-A) data and CAP survey responses.

Outreach by Type of Setting – Regional Variations

As of December 2025, status of Climate Ambassador interactions with education setting types totals 4219. Education settings may be counted in more than one column where they span multiple education phases. Combined education settings are counted in multiple categories, such as early years setting, primary or secondary, sixth form, while multi-academy trusts are recorded separately because each trust will have its own CAP. Settings categorised as "other" typically provide all-through education. This classification approach reflects the wide structural variation across education settings.

The data shows wide regional variation, with the East of England (855) and South West (701) recording the highest engagement, while London (265) is lowest. Primary settings account for the largest share (1,700) which is to be expected as primary schools make up a larger percentage of education settings. Overall, these findings indicate strong national engagement, exceeding the Phase 1 targets while also highlighting the potential need to achieve greater regional balance in Phase 2.

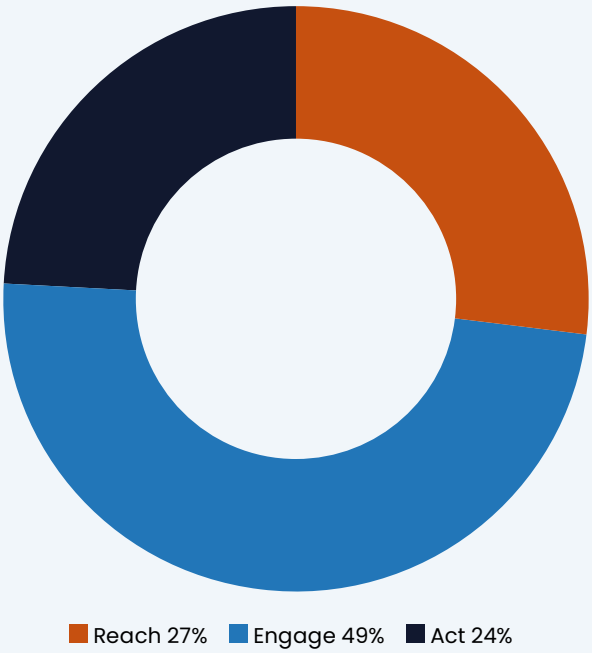
Table 1 *Regional Variation of settings by type*

	Early years	Early years and primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Combined	Further education	SEND	Trust	Other	TOTAL
East Midlands	14	99	157	0	36	33	6	16	20	1	**382**
East of England	67	191	308	0	161	0	6	74	0	48	**855**
London	9	4	189	0	29	10	2	19	1	2	**265**
North East	No data										
North West	18	151	187	2	46	43	19	21	1	0	**488**
South East	37	23	287	0	50	57	5	18	12	0	**489**
South West	42	136	291	8	55	63	12	40	44	10	**701**
West Midlands	74	108	109	3	53	35	12	13	26	4	**437**
Yorkshire and the Humber	19	244	172	0	57	59	20	10	0	21	**602**
TOTAL	**280**	**956**	**1700**	**13**	**487**	**300**	**82**	**211**	**104**	**86**	**4219**
Phase 1 target	200		1550		600		50	100			

Outreach by Reach – Engage – Act

Current total of interactions with education settings is 4036 across eight regions. Interactions with education settings are counted only once as indicated by their location regardless of whether they span multiple educational phases – for example if a primary school also has early years provision. Of 4036 interactions, 27% remain at 'reach', 49% at 'engage' and 24% at 'act'. This indicates that **73%** of Climate Ambassador interactions are **actively seeking support and guidance.**

Figure 3 *Reach – Engage – Act Nationally*



Regional Variations in Outreach

The data indicates that nearly half of all settings (48.84%) are at 'engage', making it the most common point of progress, while 'reach' (26.61%) and 'act' (24.55%) are relatively evenly spread. Regional patterns vary with the East of England (781), South West (690), and Yorkshire and Humber (594) demonstrating the highest overall activity, whereas London (255) records the lowest level across all stages. High 'engage' figures in the South East (358) and North West (358) by comparison, suggest strong potential to move towards 'act'. Overall, the distribution shows steady progression through the stages, with most regions demonstrating active movement beyond initial outreach.

Table 2 *Regional Variation of Reach – Engage – Act*

	Total	Percentage of total	East Midlands	East of England	London	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Midlands	Yorkshire and the Humber
Reach	1074	26.61%	45	366	75	No data	106	68	137	60	217
Engage	1971	48.84%	206	199	127		358	314	213	249	305
Act	991	24.55%	102	216	53		12	76	340	120	72
TOTAL	**4036**	**100%**	**353**	**781**	**255**		**476**	**458**	**690**	**429**	**594**

> Being a Climate Ambassador gives me the opportunity to really make a difference for our kids' futures: it makes me feel so much more positive.
>
> Clare Collins, Climate Ambassador.

Chris Bullough (Head Teacher), Clare Collins (Climate Ambassador), Richard Berry (Let's Go Zero Climate Action Advisor). Photo by Harry Collins of Walkington Primary School

Climate Action Plan Stage of Maturity

The CAT asks settings to rate themselves against a development matrix:

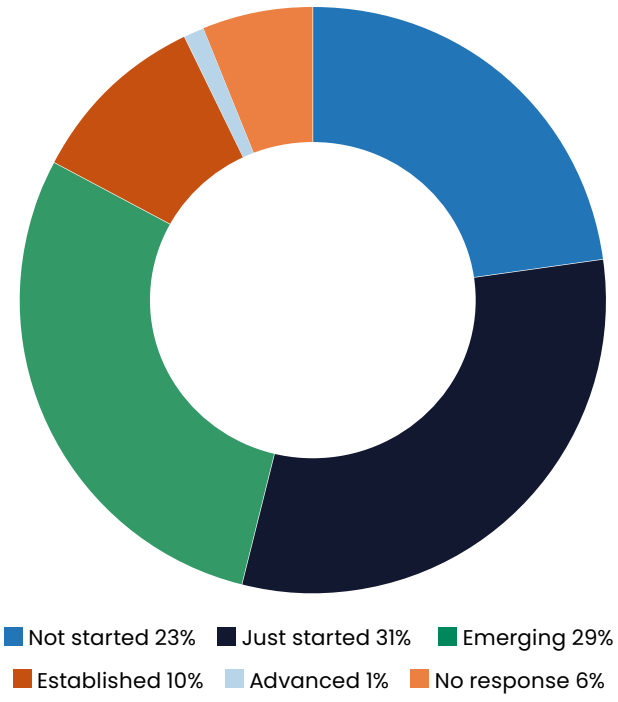
- 'not started yet' - I need more information on what is required
- 'just starting to develop our plan' - I understand the basics
- 'emerging' – actions are in place across some pillars
- 'established' – actions are in place across all pillars
- 'advanced' – meeting ambition and aspirations across all pillars

The results show that 60% of respondents are starting to develop their action plans or have actions across more than one pillar while 10% and 1% classify themselves as having actions across all pillars or meeting ambition, respectively. 23% have reported as not having started on their climate action plans.

The combined percentages of settings 'just starting', 'emerging', 'established' and 'advanced' represent 71% of responses (see Figure 4) and are consistent with the data collected through the Reach-Engage-Act framework (73%) (see Figure 3), demonstrating settings are starting to develop or have climate action plans in place.

Although it is too early to report on meaningful longitudinal data, there are indications that settings are reporting progress in their climate action planning and indicating progress along the matrix.

Figure 4 *Stages of CAP Development*



4.2 Climate Action Plan Development

'The Goal'

CAPs are robust, evolving, 'living' documents which are reviewed at least annually. They are realistic, manageable and measurable with short-, medium- and long-term SMART targets.

Each CAP addresses all 4 pillars of the DfE Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy. They demonstrate a clear path to net zero, have climate change and sustainability embedded across the formal and informal curriculum, engendering a sense of optimism among staff and students. Actions link to local communities, where relevant.

Indicators of success: Climate Action Plans

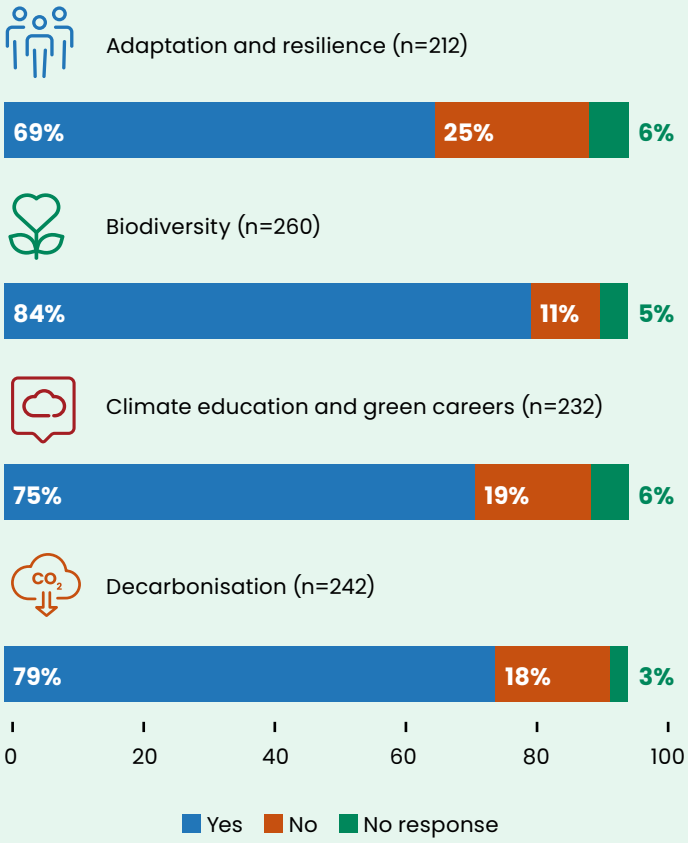
- The CAP addresses all four pillars
- The CAP is available on the setting's website and is accessible/understandable to all stakeholders
- SMART targets with explicit actions and clear milestones
- CAP has short-, medium- and long-term goals
- CAP is reviewed regularly
- Specific actions are being taken to deliver the CAP

Section 4.2 analyses data provided by education settings on the Climate Action Tracker and evaluates the development of climate action plans across the four pillars. Of the 547 responses, 308 have or are working towards a CAP. The analysis of each pillar examines the degree that actions are defined, structured and actionable, the variety of actions taken, and the challenges encountered.

Climate Action Plans Across the Four Pillars

Each pillar of the CAP is analysed in isolation and broken down into three sections to examine how embedded the pillar is, the variety of actions that have been undertaken and the challenges encountered in the development or implementation of the CAP. A whole institution approach, where climate action plans feature all four pillars, exists in 56% of those settings with a CAP.

Figure 5 *Percentage of climate actions plans that address each pillar*



Adaptation and Resilience

The findings indicate that **68.83%** of CAPs address adaptation and resilience, showing broad engagement. A strong majority (**75.47%**) of those CAPs that address this pillar include short-, medium- and long-term actions, suggesting growing strategic planning maturity. Encouragingly, **66.98%** have SMART targets in place, yet **30.19%** still lack measurable goals. However, nearly a quarter (**24.68%**) do not address adaptation and resilience at all, and **6.49%** provided no response. This may be a result of the early stages of climate action planning. Overall, the results show positive direction but highlight gaps in consistency, clarity and target-driven planning.

Table 3 *Adaptation and Resilience pillar across CAPs, n=212*

CAP addresses adaptation and resilience	
Yes	68.83%
No	24.68%
No response	6.49%
Includes short-, medium- and long-term actions	
Yes	75.47%
No	21.70%
No response	2.83%
SMART targets are in place	
Yes	66.98%
No	30.19%
No response	2.83%

Summary of Adaptation and Resilience Actions by Category

Analysis of adaptation and resilience actions reveal a strong emphasis on educational integration where **education and pedagogy** (66) accounts for the largest share of actions, with curriculum integration (29) and outdoor learning initiatives (20) emerging as dominant strategies. Whole-setting campaigns (13) and staff CPD (4) indicate efforts to build institutional culture and capacity.

Operations and behaviour (17) reflects practical measures aimed at mitigating climate impacts on setting estates. Actions around **site drainage and flooding measures** (27) and heat and shade measures (15) highlight concerns around heat stress and flooding, issues increasingly relevant under changing climate conditions[14] while **governance** (14) remains less developed, suggesting a lack of strategic integration into policy.

The reporting of **decarbonisation** (9) and **biodiversity** (20) actions within adaptation categories further suggests cross-pillar confusion and indicates that the core purpose of adaptation, building resilience to climate impacts rather than reducing emissions, is not yet fully understood. The high proportion of **not started/just started responses** (69) highlight early progress and a continued need for capacity building and clearer guidance. Overall, the findings indicate practical and educational efforts are emerging, but clearer strategic direction is required to ensure comprehensive and climate risk-focused resilience planning across all settings.

Table 4 *Summary of Adaptation and Resilience Actions by Category*

Category	Number of codes	Actions and occurrences	Total occurrences
Education and pedagogy	4	Curriculum integration (subjects/lessons) (29), outdoor learning and setting grounds (biodiversity and shade) (20), whole setting events and campaigns (13), staff CPD, teaching resources and wellbeing (4)	66
Governance and policy	4	Climate risk assessment (2), extreme weather policy (9), safeguarding policy (2), sustainability policy (1)	14
Heat and shade measures	4	Heat audit (1), shaded areas (9), solar shading (2), ventilation (3)	15
Operations and behaviours	5	Internal audits (1), behaviour change campaign (1), water audit (4), water consumption campaign (6), water consumption measures (5)	17
Site drainage and flooding measures	5	Flood assessment (3), drainage (7), grounds audit (2), Nature-based Solutions for flood prevention (1), water capture (14)	27
Wellbeing and resilience	2	Wellbeing and resilience (5), food resilience (1)	6
Partnerships and community engagement	1	External partnerships and programmes (10)	10
Decarbonisation	3	Energy saving (15), waste and recycling (10), travel initiatives (6)	31
Other	1	Not started/just started (69)	69
TOTAL			**255**

Adaptation and Resilience Development and Implementation Challenges

The analysis of reported adaptation and resilience challenges highlights significant systemic and operational barriers limiting climate-related action in education settings. **Funding and cost constraints (42)** are the most frequently reported barrier, underscoring the central role of financial resources in enabling adaptation measures. **People and capacity (45)** presents the greatest overall challenge, with limited staff time (38) and weak stakeholder buy-in (7) indicating that resilience work competes with day-to-day operational demands.

Technical and structural limitations under **estate and infrastructure (11)** including aging buildings, flooding, shading and legacy heating systems further hinder progress, highlighting the need for long-term asset planning. Procedural and informational obstacles appear in **governance (10)** and **data and information (13)**, where complex approval processes and insufficient technical knowledge impede evidence-based decision making.

Although less frequent, **operational priorities (8)** and **supply chain (1)** introduce practical constraints such as contractor availability.

Overall, the dataset indicates a need for improved funding, capacity, governance and technical capability.

Table 5 *Adaptation and Resilience Development and Implementation Challenges*

Category	Number of codes	Actions and occurrences	Total occurrences
Funding and cost constraints	1	Insufficient budget/funding (43)	43
People and capacity	3	Limited staff time/capacity (38), staff/stakeholder buy-in challenges (7), lack of knowledge/understanding (6)	51
Estate and infrastructure	2	Estate/site condition and climate resilience needs (12), external constraints (4)	16
Governance and policy	1	Governance/policy/permission hurdles (11)	11
Data and information	2	Need for technical knowledge/guidance (10), access to data/ information limitations (3)	13
Operational priorities	1	Operational priorities and disruption (8)	8
Other	1	Not started/just started (47)	47
TOTAL			**189**

Biodiversity

The findings show strong engagement with biodiversity within CAPs, with **84.42%** of settings addressing this pillar. A similarly high proportion, **76.15%** of those CAPs that address this pillar, include short-, medium- and long-term actions, indicating an established commitment to ecological improvement. However, almost one in five, **19.62%**, do not include time-bound actions, limiting strategic progression. While 66.15% report having SMART targets, **30.38%** lack measurable objectives, which may undermine monitoring and accountability. The small 'no response' rates across indicators suggest generally high awareness in comparison with the other pillars. Overall, the data demonstrates strong uptake but highlights gaps in target setting and long-term planning.

Table 6 *Biodiversity pillar across CAPs, n=260*

CAP addresses biodiversity	
Yes	84.42%
No	11.04%
No response	4.55%
Includes short-, medium- and long-term actions	
Yes	76.15%
No	19.62%
No response	4.23%
SMART targets are in place	
Yes	66.15%
No	30.38%
No response	3.46%

Summary of Biodiversity Actions by Category

Analysis of the biodiversity actions shows a strong operational emphasis on practical, site-based ecological enhancement. The most extensive category, **habitats and planting** (131) demonstrates that settings prioritise nature-rich interventions such as tree, hedgerow, and orchard planting (41), wildflower and pollinator meadows (36), and ponds or water features (23). These actions support pollinators, increase ecological complexity, and contribute to carbon sequestration, aligning with evidence that diversified habitats strengthen ecosystem resilience[15].

The second largest category, **learning, engagement and governance** (103), suggests that biodiversity is becoming embedded as a pedagogical tool. Activities such as curriculum integration, eco-leadership, community partnerships, and involvement in initiatives like the National Education Nature Park highlight efforts to strengthen scientific literacy and student agency. However, gaps remain in, progressive skill development, and inclusive access, especially for SEND learners.

Species support (37) including nest boxes, insect hotels, and wildlife shelter, indicates a more targeted approach, though less developed than habitat creation. **Grounds management and maintenance** (20) shows commitment to low intensity mowing, chemical-free practices, and biodiversity policies, yet the low volume suggests insufficient long-term stewardship to maintain newly created habitats may be a risk.

Underrepresented categories, **water and drainage** (1) reveal limited blue-green infrastructure despite its known benefits for climate adaptation and biodiversity. However, this is captured more often under Adaptation and Resilience where **drainage** (7), **nature-based solutions to flooding** (1) and **water capture** (14) feature more. **Started/not started** (76) in the 'Other' category is common across the pillars indicating that education settings are early in CAP cycles or they are still developing their climate action plans.

Overall, the data demonstrates an approach that integrates biodiversity into learning and land management but requires stronger maintenance, monitoring, water management, and species-specific strategies.

Table 7 *Summary of Biodiversity Actions by Category*

Category	Number of codes	Actions and occurrences	Total occurrences
Habitats and planting	7	Curriculum integration (subjects/lessons) (29), outdoor learning and school grounds (biodiversity and shade) (20), whole setting events and campaigns (13), staff CPD, teaching resources and wellbeing (4)	131
Species support	2	Species support (boxes, hotels, shelters) (28), feeding/watering and natural features for wildlife (9)	37
Grounds management and maintenance	3	Wild/low-intensity mowing and chemical free management (12), protection and maintenance of habitats (6), biodiversity policy/plan and governance (2)	20
Learning, engagement and governance	6	Curriculum/outdoor learning on biodiversity (30), community partnerships and programmes supporting learning (25), National Education Nature Park engagement (19), assemblies/awareness/ signage (8), establishing student eco leadership/clubs (10), auditing/ mapping biodiversity and planning projects with students (11)	103
Water and drainage	1	Rainwater harvesting/water butts (1)	1
Other	2	Other biodiversity action described (7), not started/just started (76)	83
TOTAL			**375**

Biodiversity Development and Implementation Challenges

The analysis indicates that implementation of biodiversity actions in education settings is constrained by a range of systemic, operational and capability-related barriers. **Funding and cost constraints** (51) represent the largest challenge, indicating that insufficient budget remains the most significant limiting factor in delivering biodiversity enhancements. This aligns with wider evidence that ecological interventions often require upfront investment in materials, tools, as well as ongoing maintenance resources.

Staff time and engagement barriers (45) form the second most reported constraint. Limited staff capacity (40), alongside engagement challenges (4) and low confidence (1), suggests that biodiversity work competes with core responsibilities, underscoring the need for dedicated roles, training, and structured engagement strategies.

Physical and operational constraints appear under **Estate condition and infrastructure** (30), where issues such as degraded education estate buildings (21) and conflicting grounds maintenance practices (9) hinder habitat creation and management. These barriers highlight the importance of integrated site planning and coordination between leadership, education and estates teams.

Capacity and expertise gaps are further reflected in **skills, training and guidance** (17) and **curriculum constraints** (5). Meanwhile, **governance and policy hurdles** (6) slow decision making and limit strategic adoption.

The large '**Other' category** (57) dominated by settings that have not yet started (45), suggests that many institutions remain at an early stage of biodiversity action.

Overall, the data points to the need for improved resourcing, staff capacity, estate integration, training, and clearer governance.

Table 8 *Biodiversity Development and Implementation Challenges*

Category	Number of codes	Actions and occurrences	Total occurrences
Funding and cost constraints	1	Insufficient budget/funding (51)	51
People and capacity	3	Limited staff time/capacity (40), staff/stakeholder buy-in challenges (4), low confidence in delivering biodiversity actions (1)	45
Estate and infrastructure	2	Estate/site condition and infrastructure constraints (21), grounds maintenance conflicts (9)	30
Governance and policy	1	Governance/policy/permission hurdles (6)	6
Skills, training and guidance	1	Need for training/guidance/expert support (17)	17
Teaching and learning	1	Curriculum constraints (5)	5
Other	2	Not related (12), Not started/just started (45)	57
TOTAL			**211**

Climate Education, Green Skills and Careers

The data shows that **75.32%** of climate action plans address climate education, green skills, and careers, indicating strong engagement. A similarly high proportion (**76.29%** of those CAPs that address this pillar) include short-, medium-and long-term actions, suggesting structured planning in this pillar. However, **18.51%** do not address climate education at all, and **6.17%** provided no response, highlighting inconsistent uptake across settings. The inclusion of SMART targets is moderate with **62.07%** having measurable goals, while **33.62%** lack them, which may undermine monitoring and accountability. Overall, the findings show growing integration of climate education but highlight gaps in target setting and comprehensive participation.

Table 9 *Climate Education, Green Skills and Careers pillar across CAPs, n=232*

CAP addresses climate education and skills	
Yes	75.32%
No	18.51%
No response	6.17%
Includes short-, medium- and long-term actions	
Yes	76.29%
No	19.83%
No response	3.88%
SMART targets are in place	
Yes	62.07%
No	33.62%
No response	4.31%

Climate Education, Green Skills and Careers Actions by Category

The data indicates that education settings are engaging with climate action through a broad range of curriculum-related activities. The strongest area is **teaching and curriculum** (63), where settings most frequently cite curriculum integration (34) and structured lessons and learning activities (18). This suggests that many settings are beginning to embed climate education into formal learning rather than treating it as an isolated initiative. Outdoor learning is also prominent (11), demonstrating the use of experiential approaches to support pupil learning.

Informal learning and practical projects (36) such as assemblies and themed eco weeks (23) are used to reinforce key messages, while biodiversity and planting projects (12) indicate a commitment to hands-on environmental stewardship and link to the biodiversity pillar. These activities complement curriculum learning by strengthening pupil engagement.

Careers and partnerships (49) activities highlight a growing interest in skills for a green economy, with external workshops and career-focused events offering real world relevance. However, there is comparatively low activity in **monitoring and data** (6) and the uncertainty under the '**other'** category (20) suggest that some settings remain at early stages and may require support in translating intent into structured planning. Overall, settings demonstrate momentum, but strategic coherence varies.

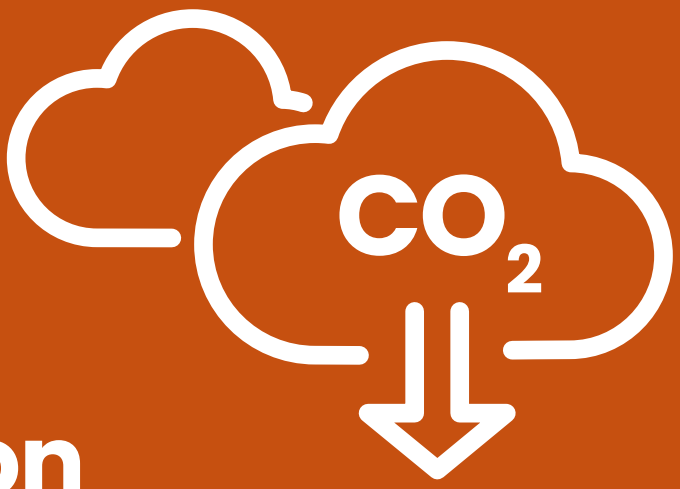
Table 10 *Climate Education, Green Skills and Careers Actions by Category*

Category	Number of codes	Actions and occurrences	Total occurrences
Teaching and curriculum	5	Curriculum integration (34), lessons and learning activities (18), outdoor learning and forest school (11)	63
Informal learning and practical projects	3	Assemblies and eco week (23), biodiversity (ponds, habitats, boxes) (6), planting and trees (6), greenhouse/polytunnel (1)	36
Careers and partnerships	3	Green careers (talks/days) (25), external visitors and workshops (24)	49
External engagement	2	Community action groups (4), regional and national organisations (13)	17
Student leadership and clubs	3	Eco committee/eco-warriors (8), student projects and pupil voice (6)	14
Monitoring and data	3	Audits and analysis (6)	6
Staff CPD and training	1	Staff CPD and training (15)	15
Other	3	First report/early stage (13), no idea/unknown (6), awaiting guidance/advice (1)	20
TOTAL			220

The findings indicate that the challenges in the curriculum pillar are mostly centred around **staff time and capacity** (50), which accounts for the highest number of challenges. These pressures limit settings' ability to develop, resource and sustain climate-related learning. Challenges relating to **funding limitations** (18) and **insufficient training and guidance** (18) are also reported, signalling gaps in both material resources and staff capability. Additional issues including **weak engagement** (5), **governance delays** (1), and **timetabling pressures** (3), further hinder effective implementation. Overall, the data suggests that settings would benefit from targeted resource, protected time, and clearer organisational processes to embed climate education effectively within the curriculum.

Table 11 *Climate Education and Green Careers Development and Implementation Challenges*

Category	Number of codes	Actions and occurrences	Total occurrences
Resources and finance	2	Budget/funding constraints (11), equipment/materials available (7)	18
Time and capacity	2	Staff time/capacity constraints (47), competing priorities (3)	50
Knowledge and training	2	Training/CPD needs (12), guidance/advice needed (6)	18
Engagement and culture	3	Community/parent engagement (4), staff engagement/buy-in (1), student engagement/leadership (0)	5
Governance and decision-making	2	Trust/MAT decisions or central control inc. PFI (1), policy/approval/ sign-off (0)	1
Scheduling and logistics	2	Curriculum timetable constraints (2), timing/scheduling issues (1)	3
Other	1	Not started/just started (4)	4
TOTAL			**99**



Decarbonisation

The data indicates that those settings with a CAP or working towards one actively address decarbonisation, with **78.57%** of settings including decarbonisation measures. **72.73%** of those CAPs that address this pillar also incorporate short-, medium-and long-term actions, suggesting growing strategic planning capacity. However, only **59.92%** of respondents have SMART targets in place, meaning over one third lack measurable or timebound objectives, which may limit accountability and progress tracking. The **18.51%** of CAPs that do not address decarbonisation, alongside notable 'no response' rates, highlights inconsistent engagement and may be a result of the early stages of climate action planning. Overall, the findings suggest encouraging intent but uneven maturity in planning and target setting.

Table 12 *Decarbonisation pillar across CAPs*

CAP addresses decarbonisation (n=242)	
Yes	78.57%
No	18.51%
No response	2.92%
Includes short-, medium- and long-term actions	
Yes	72.73%
No	24.38%
No response	2.89%
SMART targets are in place	
Yes	59.92%
No	36.36%
No response	3.72%

Summary of Decarbonisation Actions by Category

The distribution of sustainability actions across categories reveals a strong emphasis on operational and technical measures, complemented by policy integration and behavioural initiatives. **Circularity, waste, procurement and operations** (65) accounts for the highest number of reported actions, indicating that education settings prioritise interventions that are relatively low-cost and immediately actionable, such as improving recycling systems (26) and reducing food waste (15). These measures often deliver visible results and align with broader institutional sustainability goals without requiring significant capital investment.

On-site renewables and storage (37) and **energy efficiency and controls** (24) together demonstrate a greater focus on energy-related interventions. Solar PV installations dominate the renewables category (35), reflecting the maturity and cost-effectiveness of photovoltaic technology in education settings. Similarly, LED lighting upgrades (18) lead the efficiency sub-category, suggesting that settings are targeting quick-win measures with clear payback periods. However, the relatively lower counts for heating controls and equipment scheduling indicate that behavioural and system optimisation opportunities remain underexploited.

Fewer entries cite **heat decarbonisation** (e.g., **heat pumps, district heating**) relative to boiler efficiency and fabric/insulation work, likely reflecting cost and complexity. **Transport actions** lean towards behavioural initiatives (12) and some EV charging installations (9), with only occasional mentions of vehicle electrification, again likely due to cost implications.

Categories such as **monitoring and data** (28) underscore the growing recognition of measurement and verification as prerequisites for effective climate action. Energy audits, metering, and carbon calculators provide the data foundation for prioritising interventions and tracking progress against targets while **policy and planning** (38) emerges as a critical enabler, highlighting the importance of embedding climate action within governance structures. The prevalence of CAP integration suggests that many settings recognise the need for strategic frameworks to guide implementation and monitoring.

Behavioural initiatives under **behaviour change and engagement** (32) complement technical measures, with actions such as "switch-off" campaigns (16) and awareness-raising assemblies (7) aimed at fostering cultural change. These actions are essential for sustaining long-term impact, as technical interventions alone cannot achieve full decarbonisation without user engagement[16].

In the category of **water reduction** (8), limited attention to water efficiency may reflect competing priorities or perceived lower impact compared to energy-related measures. Additionally, water-related schemes are mentioned under both the adaptation and resilience and biodiversity pillars, so the number of actions under this category will be higher overall. Similarly, **funding and finance** (9) appear underrepresented with a modest number of finance-related actions. This indicates that while funding is acknowledged as a barrier, opportunities or ability to secure resources remain limited.

Table 13 *Summary of Decarbonisation Actions by Category*

Category	Number of codes	Actions and occurrences	Total occurrences
Energy efficiency and controls	4	LED lighting upgrades (18); heating controls/thermostat optimisation (4); equipment timers/scheduling (2)	24
Heating and heat decarbonisation	3	Boiler upgrade/replacement (7), insulation/building fabric improvements (4); heat pumps/low carbon heating (6)	17
On-site renewables and storage	2	Solar PV/panels (35); battery storage (2)	37
Transport and travel	3	Active travel initiatives (12); EV charging points (9); vehicle transition (1); site traffic/travel planning (2)	24
Monitoring and data	3	Energy audits/assessments (3); metering/data tracking (10); carbon footprint calculators (8)	28
Circularity, waste, procurement and operations	2	Appliance/IT efficiency (3); improved recycling systems (26); food waste reduction (15); sustainable procurement (8); reduce single-waste plastics (5); lower carbon menus (4); reuse/circular initiatives (4)	65
Water reduction (supporting decarbonisation)	1	Water efficiency/leaks (8)	8
Funding and finance (action related)	1	Grants/funding secured or applied for (9)	9
Policy and planning	1	Develop/integrate CAP and policy (38)	38
Behaviour change and engagement	4	Switch-off behaviour campaign (16); assemblies/awareness raising (7); posters/reminders (5); student eco-leadership/governance (4)	32
TOTAL			**282**

Decarbonisation Development and Implementation Challenges

The analysis of reported decarbonisation challenges highlights several systemic and operational challenges that impede the implementation of decarbonisation initiatives. **Funding and cost constraints** (66) emerged as the most frequently cited barrier, underscoring the critical role of financial resources in enabling climate action. This finding aligns with broader literature[17] emphasising that insufficient capital investment remains a primary obstacle to decarbonisation in education settings.

External dependencies (71) represent another dominant theme, reflecting the reliance on external stakeholders such as local authorities, utility companies, and landlords. These dependencies introduce delays and uncertainty, particularly where decision-making authority lies outside the setting. Such constraints suggest that collaborative governance models and early stakeholder engagement are essential for accelerating progress.

Staff limitations also feature prominently under **people and capacity** (57), with restricted staff time and competing priorities cited as major constraints. This indicates that sustainability efforts often compete with core operational demands, highlighting the need for dedicated roles or capacity-building measures to embed climate objectives within routine workflows.

Technical and structural barriers are evident in **estate and infrastructure** (19), where aging estates and legacy heating systems constrain the feasibility of low-carbon upgrades. These findings reinforce the importance of long-term asset management strategies and phased retrofit programmes to overcome physical limitations.

Information-related challenges, grouped under **data and information** (27), point to gaps in metering, baselining, and technical expertise. Without robust data and guidance, settings struggle to prioritise interventions and monitor progress. Addressing these gaps through improved monitoring systems and targeted training could enhance decision-making and accountability.

Other categories, such as **Supply chain and procurement** (9) and **operational priorities** (5), while less frequent, reveal practical issues related to lead times, contractor availability, and scheduling disruptions during term time. These operational constraints suggest that implementation planning must account for education calendars.

Overall, the data suggest that overcoming these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach: securing dedicated funding, improved cross-sector collaboration, enhancing organisational capacity and improving data systems.

Table 14 *Decarbonisation Development and Implementation Challenges*

Category	Number of codes	Actions and occurrences	Total occurrences
Funding and cost constraints	1	Insufficient budget/funding (66)	66
People and capacity	2	Limited staff time/capacity (50), staff/stakeholder buy-in challenges (7)	57
Estate and infrastructure	2	Estate condition/infrastructure constraints (15), heating and control constraints (4)	19
Governance and policy	1	Governance/policy/permission hurdles (36)	36
Data and information	2	Access to data/information limitations (15), need for technical knowledge/guidance (12)	27
Supply chain and procurement	1	Supply chain/procurement issues (9)	9
Operational priorities	2	Curriculum/operational priorities (3), installation logistics/disruption (2)	5
External dependencies	1	External dependencies (LA/utilities/landlord) (71)	71
TOTAL			**290**

4.3 Leadership and Governance

'The Goal'

Climate action is 'business as usual', where all staff understand the components of a CAP, objectives are delivered upon and success is celebrated.

A whole institution approach is embraced, and sustainability and climate action are integrated into policy and the setting's improvement/development plan. There are mechanisms in place to support senior leadership and governors, including sustainability leads, in the creation and implementation of CAPs.

Leadership understands the actions required to reduce emissions, including those changes necessary for more substantial transformation.

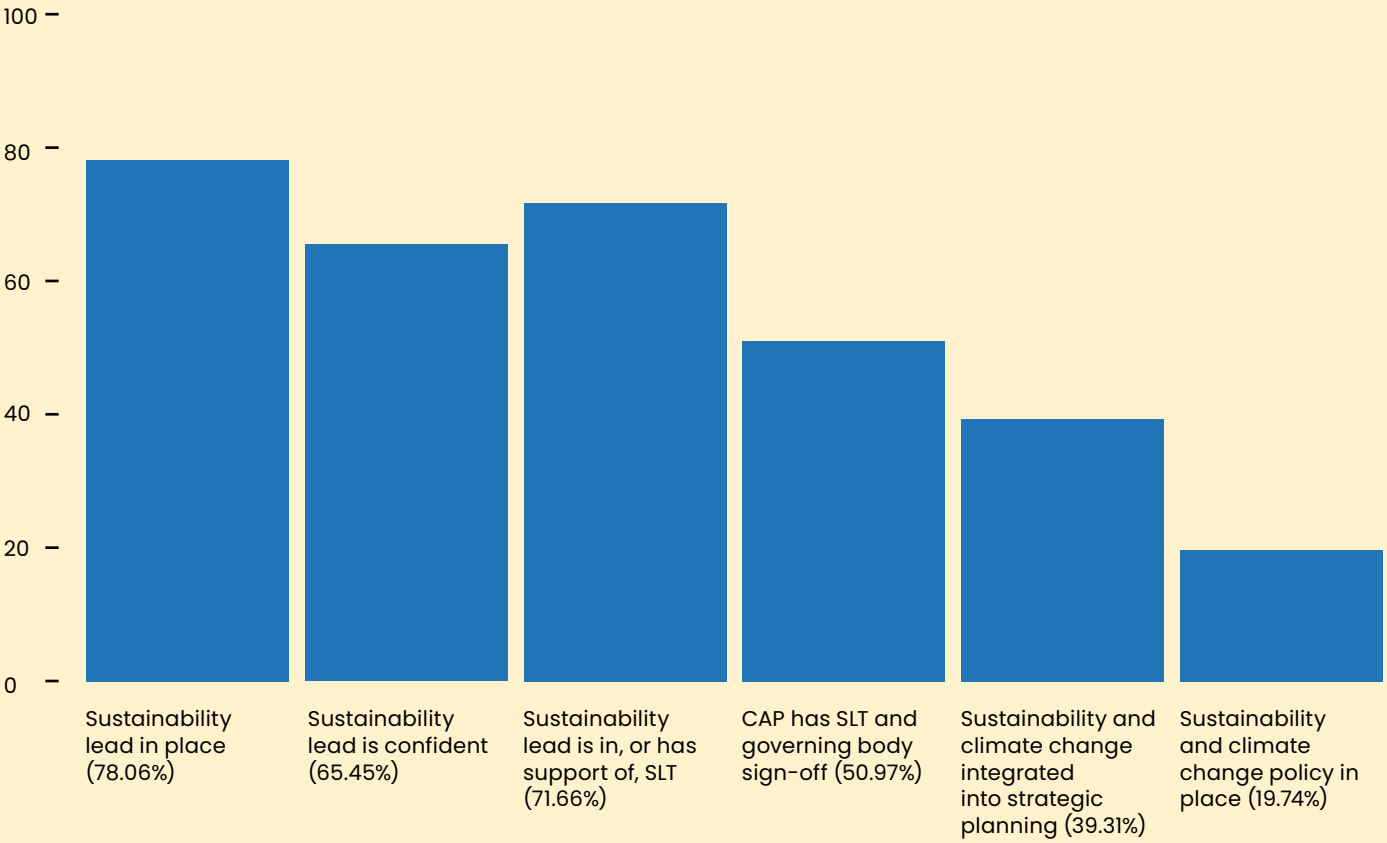
Indicators of success: Sustainability leadership

- There is a sustainability lead in place
- There is a CAP
- The sustainability lead feels confident taking ownership of a CAP
- The sustainability lead knows how to access external support
- Sustainability and climate action are integrated into the setting's development plan.
- The setting has a sustainability/climate action strategy
- The CAP has senior leadership team (SLT) and governing body sign off
- The setting has established an ongoing relationship with a Climate Ambassador, or multiple Ambassadors, for the purpose of strategic support
- Climate action is showcased across the setting

In this section we look at two factors in sustainability leadership: capacity and process. The data indicates a strong foundation for sustainability leadership across settings, with clear evidence of established sustainability lead roles and a growing confidence. A sustainability lead is in place in the majority of settings **(78%)**, and leadership capacity is further reinforced by good levels of confidence **(65%)** and significant support from senior leadership teams **(72%)**. However, the high level of support from senior leadership can also indicate that, in the case of primary schools, the sustainability lead role is often taken by the senior leadership team. What the results don't show is if the support from leadership attaches resource support. Nonetheless, these findings suggest that staffing and leadership commitment are not major barriers; instead, settings possess a capable and willing leadership base from which to progress.

Regarding sustainability leadership processes, the capacity of sustainability leads is not yet fully enabled by organisational processes. While staff demonstrate readiness, the transition from leadership capacity to institutionalisation is hindered by limited strategic integration **(39%)**, inconsistent CAP sign-off **(51%)**, and particularly low policy adoption **(20%)**. Overall, these responces indicate that sustainability leads may lack the formal structures, governance clarity, or operational levers required to drive whole setting change, despite their evident commitment and capability.

Figure 6 *Sustainability Leadership – Capacity and Process (%)*



4.4 Education Staff Preparedness

'The Goal'

All staff, including non-teaching staff, receive training and/or support to develop sustainability and climate action knowledge, and feel empowered, inspired and hopeful. Teachers and non-teaching staff have a greater understanding of what climate and sustainability means and know where to access up-to-date information and support. They are confident engaging with the topic and equipped to deliver climate education, thereby improving the sustainability and climate action knowledge, understanding and agency of each cohort they teach.

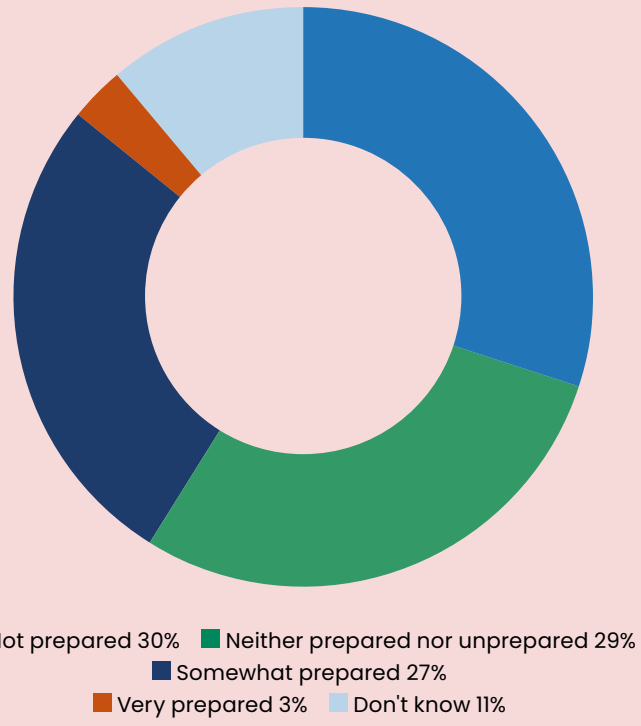
Indicators of success: Education setting staff

- Staff are aware of the actions on the CAP
- There is collaboration between staff and students in the creation of the CAP
- Education staff are confident in climate change education and how to embed it within their subject
- Education staff understand how their subject supports the transition to a green economy and green careers

Of 537 responses, the analysis of staff preparedness to deliver climate action illustrates varying levels of capacity, revealing that staff are lacking confidence in this area. The largest segment, **30%**, report feeling **'not prepared'**, indicating a significant skills and knowledge gap. A further **29%** describe themselves as **'neither prepared nor unprepared'**, suggesting uncertainty or limited understanding of the scope of sustainability and climate change and how this relates to their role. Meanwhile, **27%** feel **'somewhat prepared'**, indicating that although some staff have a basic level of understanding, this may not be sufficient for comprehensive high quality, impactful climate education.

Notably, only **3%** feel **'very prepared',** highlighting the absence of any strong expertise and the need for targeted professional development. Additionally, **11% 'don't know'**, which may reflect unclear expectations or inconsistent institutional or national guidance. Overall, the results suggest that most staff lack confidence or capability to deliver climate action effectively, underscoring the importance of strategic training, resource investment, and clearer frameworks to equip educators to deliver on this.

Figure 7 *Staff Preparedness to deliver climate action*



4.5 Climate Ambassadors

'The Goal'

A strong, diverse and sustainable network of well-trained, well-supported Climate Ambassadors (CAs), who can provide specialist knowledge and access to additional support which enables education settings to develop and implement their CAPs.

Indicators of Success: Climate Ambassadors

- Sufficient Climate Ambassadors are recruited to support CAP development and delivery in 2,500 education settings
- Climate Ambassadors have the diversity of expertise required to support CAP development and delivery across the four project pillars, in all regions
- Climate Ambassadors have undertaken core training, delivered by Change Agents
- Climate Ambassadors feel adequately prepared and supported to assist education settings throughout their journey – both creating and delivering on CAPs
- Climate Ambassadors feel empowered to continue their work with settings even if the project ends
- Climate Ambassadors are confident to adapt to and meet the needs of the education setting
- Settings and Climate Ambassadors are able to establish an ongoing working relationship if desired
- Climate Ambassadors are able to give the required advice and make use of their areas of expertise

At December 2025, more than 1,100 volunteer Climate Ambassadors from more than 500 different employers were participating in the programme.

In the analysis of the 553 responses in relation to confidence to support education settings, the mean index is 4.35/5 indicating a broadly high self-reported degree of confidence. 54.4% of responses meet or exceed the mean of 4.35. Overall, Climate Ambassadors feel confident in supporting education settings with climate action planning.

67.63% of Climate Ambassadors reported feeling confident in at least one pillar with 77% reporting confidence in more than one area. The number of responses with no reported confidence level may be due to the earlier completion of surveys where this question was not included.

The data indicates a strong concentration of confidence in **climate change education, green skills and careers** (23.9%), followed by **decarbonisation and estates** (18.6%) and **biodiversity** (16.4%) as the most frequently selected areas. **Action planning, leadership and strategy** (16.3%) also represents a substantial proportion suggesting broad capability in governance-related climate action. Confidence in **adaptation and resilience** is similarly significant (14.8%). Lower levels appear for **behaviour change** (7.3%), and only a small minority report feeling **confident in all areas** (2.8%), highlighting ongoing development needs in cross-cutting competencies.

Table 15 *Climate Ambassador Confidence*

Theme	Occurrences	% of total
Adaptation and resilience	159	14.8%
Biodiversity	176	16.4%
Climate change education, green skills and careers	257	23.9%
Decarbonisation and estates	200	18.6%
Action planning, leadership and strategy	175	16.3%
Behaviour change	78	7.3%
I feel confident in all areas	30	2.8%
TOTAL	**1075**	**100%**

Among the 553 Climate Ambassadors surveyed, **291 provided responses** to the question on their support needs, with many offering **multiple suggestions**. The most frequent needs relate to **practical materials and tools** (115), particularly requests for **resources and toolkits** and **case studies**, indicating a strong desire for ready-to-use, practice-focused materials. Substantial demand also appears for **access and engagement with settings** (62) and **skills and knowledge development** (51), highlighting the importance of structured opportunities and targeted capability building. Requests for **peer and community support** (50) further emphasise the value of collaborative learning, while **enablers and logistics** (18) suggest operational barriers remain for some Climate Ambassadors.

Table 16 *Climate Ambassador Support Needs*

Category	Number of codes	Actions (code – occurrences)	Total occurrences
Practical materials/tools	3	Resources and toolkits (97), case studies and examples (18)	115
Access and engagement with settings	2	Matching and opportunities (55), comms and outreach (templates/ messaging) (7)	62
Skills and knowledge development	3	Training and CPD (32), facilitation and delivery skills (19), curriculum and education system insight (1)	51
Peer and community support	2	Peer support, mentoring and shadowing (35), regional Hub coordination (14)	50
Enablers and logistics	3	Time and scheduling (8), funding and expenses (6), platform/ process guidance (4)	18
General/other	1	General/other support (70)	70

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The findings indicate that education settings are steadily advancing in their climate action journeys, with most interactions classified within the 'engage' or 'act' categories, indicating that they are actively progressing through their climate action planning. This pattern reinforces the programme's Theory of Change, demonstrating that its design and delivery are effectively supporting the intended outcomes.

While decarbonisation, adaptation, biodiversity and climate education are being addressed, there are disparities both within and across the pillars, and only 56% of settings demonstrate action across all four. Overlap of actions between pillars further suggests a lack of clarity about what constitutes meaningful action in each area. Additionally, gaps in SMART targets, inconsistent data quality and the early maturity of many actions indicate that settings remain in the initial phases of planning and require more structured guidance and support to embed sustained and measurable change.

Leadership commitment appears strong, with 78% of settings reporting having a sustainability lead in place with high levels of senior leadership support. However, the organisational processes needed to embed climate action as "business as usual" remain underdeveloped. Staff confidence is a major limiting factor, with only 3% feeling very prepared to deliver climate-related education and 59% feeling unprepared or unsure.

Funding and cost constraints are the most frequently cited barriers across all pillars, reinforcing the critical role of financial resources in enabling climate action. This finding aligns with wider evidence that insufficient capital investment is a primary obstacle to sustainability improvements in education settings[1]. Estate-related challenges, such as aging infrastructure and limited technical capacity, further constrain progress.

There is a broad range of expertise amongst Climate Ambassadors who report high levels of confidence but request more practical tools, structured engagement pathways and training and opportunities for peer collaboration to maximise their impact.

Recent national policy developments, such as the Education Estates Strategy and the Curriculum Assessment Review, further reinforce the objectives of the Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy and signal growing mainstream recognition of the value of sustainability action in education. However, it remains too early to assess their full impact or the extent to which they may drive sector-wide transformation.

Overall, the evidence suggests the education sector is motivated, but challenges remain in limited staff capacity, a lack of accessible resources, uneven governance structures and early stage development. These challenges hinder the transition from enthusiastic engagement to full institutionalisation of climate action.

5.2 Recommendations

These findings are not only a reflection on progress to date but are intended to inform future policy and practice.

For the Climate Ambassadors Programme

Across the Climate Ambassadors programme's regional and national governance, leadership and delivery structures there is a strong commitment to continue to 'test and learn' whilst using evidence to inform future activity.

1. Enhance Climate Ambassador capacity with resources, networks and training

To increase consistency and impact across the network, embed structured engagement processes to enhance setting use of the Climate Action Tracker, increasing sustainability leads' capacity as an additional benefit.

Strengthen peer learning networks to build a cohesive, confident Climate Ambassador community by facilitating regular opportunities for peer collaboration and the development of communities of practice to drive ongoing development and expand cross-pillar capability and confidence.

2. Conduct a cross-regional process evaluation to inform Phase 2 delivery

To understand regional variation in engagement and strengthen consistency, a process evaluation of outreach, recruitment and support across Regional Hubs and relevant national activities should be undertaken, enabling clearer insight into how processes influence progression from Reach to Act.

3. Introduce a consistent national monitoring and reporting framework for Climate Action Plans

To address gaps in baseline data and improve impact reporting, embed the Climate Action Tracker as a sector-wide monitoring framework to provide consistency and enable longitudinal measurement of progress across all pillars.

This could require annual or bi-annual completion as part of national sustainability reporting, strengthening Climate Ambassador conversations with education settings as a result. This will enable longitudinal analysis and support evidence-based decision making at local, regional and national levels.

With the Wider Sector

The Climate Ambassadors programme does not work in isolation – we're part of a rich ecosystem, and collaboration is a critical part of how we work. Some of the insights in this report suggest opportunities for broader change, beyond our one programme, that would create a more enabling environment for sustainability and climate action in education.

We want to be explicit – these are not asks of any one entity or organisation. Education sector activities and priorities are shaped by a wide range of influences and levers across the system, from sector bodies, trade unions, funders, local authorities, policy makers to civic organisations. We will continue to collaborate with stakeholders to share evidence, surface what's working, to support broader change that creates this environment.

1. Clarify definitions and guidance for each CAP pillar

To increase consistency and improve understanding, develop clearer definitions and examples of actions for adaptation, biodiversity, climate education and decarbonisation to reduce overlap between pillars and ensure settings understand the scope and intent of each area.

2. Expand funding access and improve capital investment pathways

Recognising the significant investment and progress already made across the sector, we will continue to work with partners to support coordinated approaches and capacity building for sustainability action in education at regional and national levels, helping to identify opportunities and priorities for settings to progress their sustainability ambitions. We will also support opportunities for education staff professional development to build capacity and strengthen knowledge across the sector. This work is intended to inform collaborative action and shared learning across the system, rather than to assess performance or attribute responsibility to individual organisations.

3. Build whole-setting capacity through professional development, strengthening leadership processes and governance mechanisms

Improve access to role-appropriate professional development that builds staff confidence and capability in climate education, and teaching resources to map it to the curriculum. Help make leadership for sustainability easier to resource and sustain by clarifying expectations for, and supporting, sustainability lead roles. Settings also noted the benefit of governance arrangements that routinely include climate and sustainability within reporting and review cycles, supported by practical templates and guidance.

Appendix 1: Theory of Change

A. Contextual conditions

- The English education system is both a significant contributor to climate change and is likely to be strongly affected by it.
- UK Government policy is for the UK to be the world-leading education sector for sustainability and climate change by 2030.
- The UK Government is committed to delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- A significant majority of staff in education settings and young people have expressed a desire to improve the performance of the education sector on sustainability and climate change.
- An ecosystem of projects designed to tackle these issues has been funded and can work together to deliver change.
- There is widespread engagement by sector and other bodies with sustainability and climate change.
- Numerous briefings from academia, industry and business show skills gaps, the economic benefits of transitioning to a sustainable economy and the critical need for investment in skills and training to enable that transition.
- Education settings currently do not have the incentives nor requirement to develop and delivery CAPs. This, alongside capacity and resource challenges, means uptake is piecemeal and in the long term success of the DfE Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy may be limited by wider contextual and structural factors unless a more enabling environment is created.

B. Rationale

- UK Government policy is that all education in England should produce a Climate Action Plan (CAP) by 2025.
- Meaningful development and delivery of an achievable, high quality and impactful CAP will ensure education settings are more resilient to the effects of climate change, are reducing their negative impacts, maximizing their positive ones and ensuring learners are exposed to and benefit from climate and sustainability education and skills development, helping them contribute to national and global sustainability goals as well as equipping them for their lives and ensuring we have the right skills for 'green jobs'.
- While many settings have ambitions to produce a holistic CAP, few have begun to do so and few have the skills and resources to produce an actionable, meaningful CAP.
- Settings have different barriers to progress depending upon their prior development, knowledge, context and resources, as described by the different school archetypes produced by Sustainability Support for Education.
- Whilst education settings report they have neither the expertise nor capacity to progress the development and delivery of CAPs, there are plentiful experts and those with an interest and commitment to sustainability across the country who can support this process, whether from a change management or technical perspective.
- Broadening the current Climate Ambassadors (CA) programme to include those with skills to help different settings at different points on their journeys will significantly enhance their ability to produce meaningful, actionable CAPs.

C. Inputs

People

- Project management team (2.15 FTE)
- Regional Hubs (~11 FTE)
- Supporting staff
- Ambassadors (~1000 volunteers by end of project)

Infrastructure

- STEM Learning platform

Funding

- £1.9m from DfE

Resources

- Support mechanisms hosted on Sustainability Support for Education

D. Outputs

- Number of Ambassadors and number of education settings engaged (measured by KPIs)
- Number and quality of meaningful interactions between education settings and CAs (measured by KPIs)
- Quality measures developed by impact national task to include narrative of CAP production and progress
- Tools and guidance to help recruit and train Climate Ambassadors and to encourage meaningful interactions between education settings and Climate Ambassadors

E. Outcomes

- At least 2,500 settings have been supported by Ambassadors to produce CAPs
- A significant proportion of Ambassadors feel empowered to continue their work with settings even if the project ends
- A continuing CA programme can exist outside of DfE funding

F. Impact

- Settings deliver on CAPs to improve climate education, mitigate and adapt to climate change and enhance their biodiversity
- As a result, increased number of learners understanding sustainable development and developing relevant skills and competencies
- Education settings' negative environmental impact is reduced
- Improved edcation sector results
- Measures relate to success of DfE Sustainability and Climate Change Unit and project ecosystem, not just CA project

C-to-D assumptions

- Regional Hubs operate throughout the project and are successful at recruiting Ambassadors at sufficient scale and quality
- Settings engage with the programme
- Underpinning infrastructure functions and fits delivery aims

D-to-E assumptions

- Ambassadors have appropriate skills and training to help with CAP preparation
- The right Ambassadors are matched with the right settings to help them move forward
- The CA programme and other sister projects complement each other

E-to-F assumptions

- Settings have resources (people and funding) and motivation/time to deliver on CAPs
- Progress can be measured at system level by DfE and others

G. Supporting activities

- Project management team provide enough support and guidance to enable the Hub teams to develop and recruit and support Climate Ambassadors and education settings
- Funding flows efficiently to Regional Hubs
- National digital infrastructure from STEM Learning is fit for purpose and can be developed along with programme needs
- Communications strategy at national and regional level is effective at bringing CAs and settings into the programme
- CAs engage effectively with programme training to allow them to support CAP development
- Alignment between sister projects maximises opportunities for engagement from various stakeholders

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