

THE STATE OF OCEAN LITERACY IN THE UK

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TO SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION



Our research with teachers in primary and secondary schools shows that teachers have an important part to play in helping the next generation to live more sustainable lives.

83% of teachers feel they have a role to play in supporting young people to be able to take action on ocean sustainability.

By facilitating discussion, guiding young people to make informed decisions, and showing them how their actions have an impact on their world, they promote the development of a world that ensures environmental protection and conservation, promotes social equity and encourages economic sustainability.

BUT HOW DO TEACHERS FEEL ABOUT THIS ROLE? WHAT DO THEY NEED TO SUPPORT THEM?

Our research with teachers examines their attitudes to sustainability education, their needs and their confidence teaching for sustainability, as well as vital insight into how they perceive the attitudes and knowledge of their students.

We found that many teachers don't have the support they need to fully examine crucial global issues with their classes – whether that's time, resources or knowledge.

Two thirds voiced their concern that their students don't fully understand how we are impacting our oceans.

It is clear that there is more to be done to ensure teachers and schools can fulfill their vital role in preparing young people for an uncertain future.



“ My role is to educate and prepare students for the future. Preparing them to make decisions for a sustainable life should then lead to them demanding action from leaders. It also means that they understand that they can make a difference in their everyday life, that their individual actions matter rather than just believing that it is down to those in power to take responsibility. ”

Secondary School Geography teacher, Cheshire



METHODOLOGY

The Marine Stewardship Council UK (MSC) worked with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER www.nfer.ac.uk), running an online survey 13th-18th March 2020, just before the government announcement on 18th March that schools would close for most young people.

It was completed by a nationally representative sample of **1,337 practising teachers** from 1,172 state funded schools in England. We asked them about the

“ I think it is vital now more than ever that the children understand how to live sustainably as they will be the ones that will be able to make the large impacting decisions that will help to protect our world from the effect of climate change. The children are passionate about it [...]. It is important they are taught about this properly. ”

Primary School teacher, London

environmental issues they prioritise in school, their capacity to focus on sustainability in the curriculum, and the resources and support they need to help young people understand ocean conservation and sustainability.

To support these results, we asked teachers for their views on sustainability issues on Survey Monkey, in partnership with Eco-Schools England. Over 100 teachers shared their opinions with us between the 7th April and 3rd May 2020. The survey was communicated through the MSC social media channels and the Eco-schools coordinators network, many of whom already see themselves as sustainability champions within their schools. Both questionnaires were developed in partnership with SEALIFE and Eco-Schools England teams.



RIISING ENVIRONMENTAL ANXIETY AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

We're living in a world where younger generations' activism for the planet is more important than ever but it is concerning that **over half of teachers (53%)** reported that anxiety about environmental issues is rising among young people in their school.

“It's our job to empower the whole child, not only to increase their knowledge but give them the skills and confidence to apply that knowledge to improve their lives and the lives of others in the world their generation wants to establish.”

Primary School teacher, South West

Teachers have a role to play in reassuring and empowering young people. **71% of teachers** say they want to use their power as an educator to prepare the next generation to make decisions for sustainable lives.

“I want the children to have a good grasp of the realities of our world and feel empowered to deal with them.”

Upper Primary School Teacher, East Midlands



TEACHERS' PRIORITIES IN SUSTAINABILITY

When it comes to teaching about sustainability, teachers have a range of priorities. Depending on the type of school, the level of children and the curriculum, the social or environmental issues to be covered in the classroom are diverse.



Reducing waste is the top priority for primary schools, with three quarters of teachers saying it is one of their top three goals.

In secondary schools, **diversity and equality** was selected by two thirds of teachers.



Young people's passion and activism on **climate change** in recent years is reflected to some extent in school; teachers in both primary and secondary schools identified it as their third priority in sustainability.

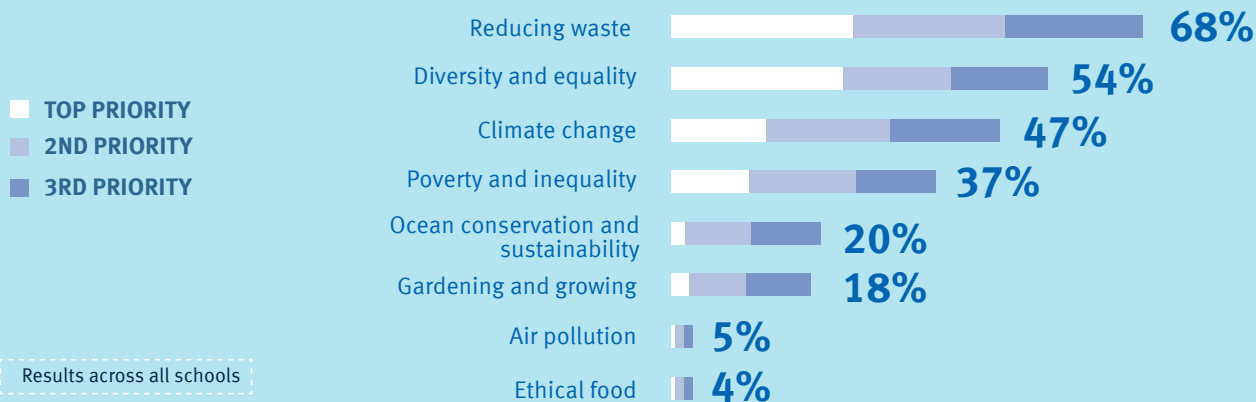


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“For us to succeed we must prepare the next generation for what's to come so they can learn to handle what comes after them.”

Teacher of 7-18 year olds, West Midlands

Which of the following social or environmental issues are the top priorities for teachers to cover in your school (based on guidance teachers are given and current teaching plans)?



TEACHERS WANT TO ADDRESS THEIR STUDENTS' INTEREST IN OCEAN SUSTAINABILITY

Four in ten teachers think their students care deeply about ocean sustainability and nearly **three quarters (74%)** say students are passionate to learn more.

But while **two thirds** are concerned that their students don't fully understand how humans are impacting the health of our oceans, sadly the issue of ocean conservation and sustainability is only a top priority in **20% of classrooms**.

Ocean sustainability is a priority for a higher proportion of primary schools (**26%**) than secondary schools (**12%**). However, the topic is of interest to a high proportion of teachers - **60%** think this topic doesn't get the attention it deserves in the curriculum and would like to do more. **Four fifths** want to help support students to be able to take action on ocean sustainability.

Some areas of ocean sustainability are covered slightly better than others, but none are covered fully. **41%** of teachers in the UK say overfishing/sustainable fishing is not part of their teaching but they would like to see it included in the future.

Around **40%** of teachers agree there could be improvements in the way they cover ocean food webs, ocean biodiversity and plastic pollution.

Over three-quarters (**77%**) of teachers told us that they think teaching about the future of food and sustainable consumption is important to them, with this topic being either part of the curriculum already, or something that teachers want to see included in the future.

TEACHERS LACK KEY SUPPORT TO TEACH ABOUT THE OCEAN

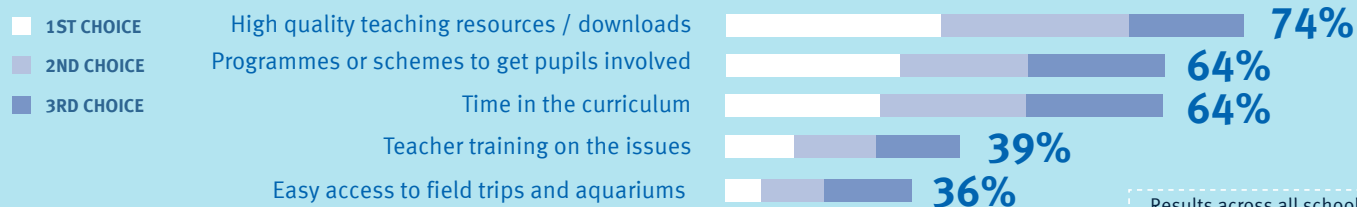
Teachers told us that they and their students want to do more to improve ocean literacy in the classroom, but it is clear from our research that they lack crucial support to be able to turn this into a reality. Only **18%** of teachers say they have the resources they need to teach and discuss ocean conservation and sustainability, and two thirds would like to improve their own knowledge.

Teachers need a range of support but **resources, training and time** are all needed. Overall, all teachers rate teaching resources as the most helpful thing to support understanding. However, there are some marked differences between teachers of different age groups.

Teachers in secondary schools say they most need time in the curriculum, whereas primary teachers say they most need learning resources. Teachers' third priority also differed across the age groups. Primary teachers want programmes or schemes to get young people involved in sustainability, whereas secondary teachers ranked teacher training as their third highest priority.



Which of the following resources or support do you believe would be most helpful in supporting your school to help pupils understand ocean conservation and sustainability?



“I want to learn more as well as teach others, not just children but all of us.”

Primary School Teacher, North West

Marine Stewardship Council

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



83%

of teachers feel they have a role to play in supporting young people to be able to take action on ocean sustainability



71%

of teachers confirmed they want to use their power as an educator to prepare the next generation, as individuals, to make decisions for sustainable lives

4/10

teachers say their students care deeply about ocean sustainability



Three in five

teachers think ocean sustainability doesn't get the attention it deserves in the curriculum



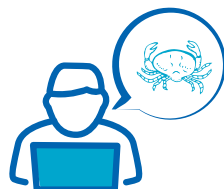
53%

of teachers reported that anxiety about environmental issues rising among young people in their school



Only 18%

of teachers say they have the resources they need to teach and discuss ocean conservation and sustainability



77%

of teachers think teaching about the future of food and sustainable consumption is important

74%

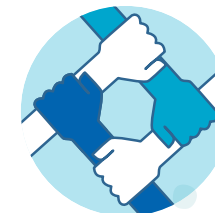
of teachers say their students are passionate to learn more about

the ocean



2/3

of teachers say they are concerned that their students don't fully understand how humans are impacting the health of our oceans



4/5

of teachers feel their school could do more to help young people take an active role on the environment

The MSC has been working on education for a number of years, and this report and its findings can galvanise us as we seek to expand the reach, depth and impact of our work. As a result, we are able to make a set of exciting commitments about the role we can play in ocean sustainability education in the UK.

MSC COMMITMENTS

- 1 We will use our mission to ensure sustainable fishing and the power of our blue fish label, to educate, inspire and empower young people to take action to ensure the sustainability of our oceans for generations to come. Our scientific approach to ocean sustainability and our expertise, coupled with a simple call to action to choose sustainable seafood, puts us in a unique position to make a difference to ocean literacy in the UK. We have a role to play and we look forward to fulfilling that role.
- 2 Teachers have told us they want high quality learning resources and tools to use in their classrooms. At MSC we have started to produce these, and we will listen to teachers' and young people's feedback about them and use their insights to create the tools they need – we have some and will build more.
- 3 The MSC brings together the ocean community – from fishers and commercial companies, to aquaria and scientific institutions – and we can go further when we work together. We will seek out and work in partnership with the ocean community to offer schools and young people new ways to engage with and be inspired by the ocean and its marine life within.

THE MARINE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL



For over 20 years, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), a non-profit global organisation, has been tackling the problem of rebuilding our oceans and ending overfishing by incentivising people to change their behaviour: from fishers to the supply chain, from NGOs to institutions, from consumers to citizens. We want to help build young people's ocean literacy – an understanding of the ocean's influence on us and our influence on the ocean – and we recognise it is a crucial component in fulfilling our mission to protect our oceans for generations to come.

“We believe that children are interested in these topics and worry when they feel they can't do anything about them so we want to give them the opportunity and the belief that they do have the power to change the world, starting right now, thinking locally, nationally and globally. This gives them hope and helps balance the fear.

When ... the curriculum is part of a topic that the children are really interested in, they get involved and learning is deeper, and when it is about real things they can see that it matters.

These topics also give them opportunities to grow character and transferable skills, such as kindness and citizenship. Plus, it is a great way to educate parents because children go home and talk about the subjects and demand change.

Upper primary teacher, South East



*We want future generations to be able to enjoy seafood and oceans full of life, forever. Supporting schools, teachers and young people to teach and learn about ocean sustainability is an important part of this. What is clear from this survey is that many **teachers already have the passion to empower the next generation with the knowledge and skills to make sustainable choices.** However, **teachers are lacking the resources they need** to do this effectively at primary and secondary levels.*

*We also know that **many young people are passionate about creating a more sustainable world**, and their teachers agree. Young people have been inspired by documentaries like Blue Planet to take action to protect our ocean. While there is much we can learn from this, **it is worrying that over half of teachers say that students' anxiety about sustainability is rising**, particularly at a time when so many young people's lives have been negatively impacted by COVID-19. We want to do what we can to be part of the solution.*



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For MSC teaching and learning resources: www.msc.org/uk/education



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