

A six-step guide to building a climate action plan

Introduction

This how-to guide has been created to support Sustainability Leads to work in partnership with a Climate Ambassador to develop a bespoke climate action plan (CAP) for their school.

The guide offers a six-step journey to follow, and provides a set of resources and activities that will support you in creating a plan that is both impactful and feasible.

As part of the [Department for Education's sustainability strategy](#), all education settings in the UK are required to have a Sustainability Lead and climate action plan by the end of 2025.

The specific type of climate action plan required is intentionally flexible: this is to account for the unique context of each setting. However, some common guiding principles can be found below.

A climate action plan *must*:

- Include a set of actions across the Department for Education's four pillars of sustainability
- Contain information detailing how the actions will be achieved

A climate action plan *should*:

- Record any actions that the school has already taken
- Identify school-specific, long-term goals across the four pillars of sustainability
- Have a detailed plan of climate actions the school will take in the next year
- Identify who is responsible for taking actions and gathering resources
- Identify longer-term strategic plans that need approval or support from the school's leadership

How to use this guide

Following the six, sequential steps in this guide will produce a climate action plan that adheres to the Department for Education's guidelines.

Each step is broken down into three sections which centre around a one-hour interactive session between a Climate Ambassador and a school Sustainability Lead. There are tasks and activities to complete before and after that discussion.

The three sections are colour-coded (as shown below) so that you can easily identify which section of the step you are working through.

These tasks and activities will ensure that you have the information needed to have in-depth discussions and to ultimately complete all sections of the climate action plan template.

	What is contained in each section?
Pre-discussion activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A list of goals for the step• Two information gathering activities
Interactive session	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three questions to be discussed• Tips for having a productive discussion
Post-discussion activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two reflective activities• A checklist of the most important tasks to be completed

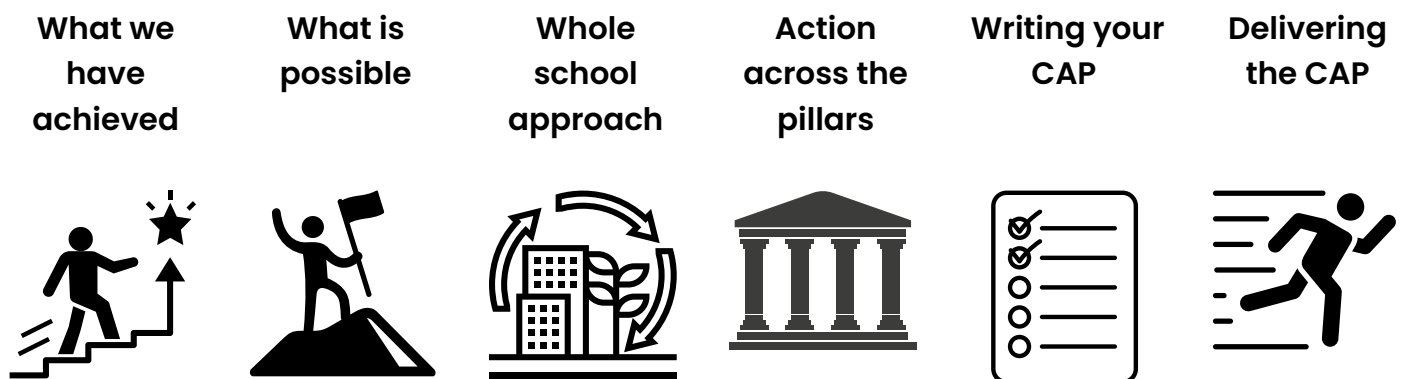
Additional resources

This guide is accompanied by a CAP template which can be found [here](#). It is intentionally simple and can be adapted by each setting to meet a school's specific needs please download the document and open your own version that you can edit.

The six-step journey

The six-steps shown below will prompt you to make decisions and gather the information required to create a climate action plan for your school.

The content of these steps has been designed for schools at different stages of their sustainability journey. Whether your school is just getting started or has already taken a wide range of climate actions, your journey through these steps should enable you to create an impactful climate action plan.



What to expect and getting prepared

The Climate Ambassador programme in London supports schools to create their climate action plan within one school term.

The logistical steps of moving through the programme are outlined below:

- Step 1) Familiarise yourself with this guide
- Step 2) Schedule the 6 interactive discussions in advance
- Step 3) Work through steps collaboratively to complete the tasks and activities
- Step 4) Review the programme checklist and complete any outstanding tasks

Climate Ambassadors have agreed to contribute 12 hours to this process, in addition to completing training from the London Climate Ambassadors regional hub at UCL.

The leadership in each school has agreed to give Sustainability Leads 8.5 hours to work on this process, in addition to any supporting training from the London Climate Ambassadors hub.

While it is possible to complete all activities and tasks within the time allotted between you, you may want to spend longer on specific sections, activities or tasks. If time permits, we encourage you to

explore any particular areas of interest for your school in greater depth.

Completing each step

We estimate that doing the core work of each step will take about 1.5 - 2 hours, including the hour devoted to an interactive discussion between the Climate Ambassador and Sustainability lead.

In addition, you should expect to spend some time talking to staff members, building connections and identifying suitable resources.

Based on the training, time commitment and expectations of Climate Ambassadors and Sustainability Leads, a guideline for roles and responsibilities is set out below:

Climate Ambassador	Sustainability Lead
Leading on gathering information about relevant actions, programmes or opportunities the school could take	Leading on gathering information about the school's unique context: including the needs, challenges and opportunities for taking climate action
Leading on maintaining momentum through the process by organising discussion times and checking that key tasks are completed	Completing the tasks and information-gathering preparatory work to enable discussions with the Climate Ambassador
Supporting with any challenges to completing the programme. This may involve joining peer sessions or contacting the London regional hub for support when needed	Identifying challenges to completing tasks, organising discussions, or writing the climate action plan and bringing them to the Climate Ambassador's and/or school leadership's attention
Reviewing the draft climate action plan	Writing the climate action plan
Ensuring the final programme checklist is complete and deciding how/if they will provide ongoing support to the Sustainability Lead	Co-ordinating the implementation of the actions set out in the climate action plan, including seeking support from relevant people and organisations



Step one: What have we achieved?

These pre-session activities are designed to be done independently by either the Climate Ambassador or Sustainability Lead. Start by both reading through the goals of this step and the activities and deciding who will be responsible for completing each one.

Step one goals

- Capture and celebrate climate action that has already taken place in the setting
- Know how climate action is related with to your school's priorities for improvement
- Find areas of potential cross-over between other school priorities and climate action

Pre-session activities

What action is already taking place?

- Look around your school site, what climate friendly actions are already taking place?
- Ask other members of staff if they can think of any climate actions that have already taken place
- Reflect on any documentation from previous programmes your school has been a part of e.g. eco-schools

- Read over your school's development/ improvement plan
- List the top five priorities for improvement that your setting wants to achieve

What are your school's priorities for improvement?

Discussion

These three questions should be explored in discussion between the Sustainability Lead and Climate Ambassador.

Top tips

- Make independent notes before or during the session on each question to enable you to share all your individual ideas.
- If you cannot find any cross-over between climate action and your school improvement plan, read this resource on the links between [Ofsted reporting and climate action](#).
- When thinking about actions your school is already taking, remember these things can be big or small and may have been implemented to for another reason e.g. to save money

Questions

You're probably already doing more than you think

What is your school doing already that can be linked to climate action or sustainability?

Think about:

- Extracurricular clubs
- Planting and growing on site
- Waste and recycling
- Energy efficiency
- Climate education
- Previous programmes your school has been a part of

How can taking climate action benefit your school community in other ways?

Think about benefits to:

- Learners
- Staff
- The local community

Other benefits of taking climate action

Aligning with school priorities

How can climate action support your school's other improvement priorities?

Think about:

- The priorities you identified in your school improvement plan
- The other benefits to the school community you identified

Reflections

Linking to current plans for school improvement

Speak to staff about current changes and improvements taking place in the school.

Identify:

- Any specific improvement policies, goals or changes in the school that could link to climate action e.g curriculum review, SEN policy, new building
- Who is responsible for those actions

Fill in the first section of the climate action plan template: 'What have we already achieved?'

What action is already taking place?

Step one checklist

We have filled in the first section of the CAP template: "what have we already achieved?"	
We have produced a list of my school's improvement/development priorities and ideas for how they cross over with climate action	
We have produced a list of current improvement plans for the school that cross-over with climate action and the staff responsible	



Step two: What is possible?

These pre-session activities are designed to be done independently by either the Climate Ambassador or Sustainability Lead. Start by both reading through the goals of this step and the activities and deciding who will be responsible for completing each one.

Step two goals

- Identify climate actions already taking place across London
- Build a vision of what climate action you would like to see take place in your school
- Explore how you can support your school community to generate their own ideas for climate action

Pre-discussion activities

What inspiring stories of climate action have people already come across?

Ask colleagues, parents, friends and learners if they know any stories of local or school-specific climate action projects.

Here's some examples to use as conversation starters:

- Hackney schools - [organic produce](#), [environmental education](#), [solar](#)
- Barnet schools - [biodiversity](#), [natural ventilation](#), [citizen assembly](#)
- Westminster schools - [air quality](#)

- Review some [case studies](#) of schools taking climate action across the four sustainability pillars.
- Watch some videos of stories of action across the pillars:
 - Biodiversity - [air quality](#); [connecting to nature](#)
 - Decarbonisation - [solar](#); [Felix food project](#); [school streets](#)
 - Adaptation and resilience - [flood risk](#); [green playgrounds](#)
 - [Climate education](#) and [green careers](#)

What are education settings already doing?

Discussion

Top tips

- Make independent notes before or during the session on each question to enable you to share all your individual ideas
- If possible bring in interested parents, staff and learners for this discussion.
 - For example, you could use these questions as a first step in building a staff sustainability working group.

Questions

What could your school look and feel like in the future?

If your whole school community was to take climate action across the four pillars, what could your school look like in 25 years time?

Think about:

- In what ways would the site look different?
- How would travel, food and waste change?
- What might students learn differently?
- What careers might students go into?
- How might your setting be more resilient to extreme weather?

What would be some long-term goals your school could work towards to achieve that vision?

Think about:

- What your school could achieve under each pillar of sustainability
- Which areas of action under each pillar feel most relevant to your school's context and goals for improvement

Long-term goals

Your school's vision

How could you as the Sustainability Lead or Climate Ambassador support the school community to generate their own ideas for climate action in your school?

Think about how you might engage:

- Learners
- Staff
- Parents and care givers

Reflections and tasks

School-specific goals

Fill in your school specific goals under each pillar of action. Remember: these can be adapted or added to in the future.

The goals can be:

- Specific and numbered e.g. '50% of students using public transport'
- Placed under the pillars that feel relevant to your setting e.g. 'increased plant life on site'; 'embedding climate education across the curriculum'

Read through this [resource](#) for engaging learners in creating their own vision of climate action.

Speak to staff and school leadership about potential opportunities (during this school term) to engage learners in generating ideas for your climate action plan – including goals which align with the goals you have just set.

Engaging learners in developing the climate action plan

Step two checklist

	<p>We have filled in our school specific goals under each pillar on our climate action plan (noting these can be updated over time)</p>	
	<p>We have a list of potential ways our school could engage different members of our school community in generating ideas for the CAP long-term</p>	
	<p>We have organised a plan for at least one lesson, workshop or assembly to engage learners in ideas generation for actions they want to see in the climate action plan</p>	



Step three: A whole-school approach

These pre-discussion activities are designed to be done independently by either the Climate Ambassador or Sustainability Lead. Start by both reading through the goals of this step and the activities and deciding who will be responsible for completing each one.

Step three goals

- Identify climate actions or programmes that other members of the school community may be interested in getting involved with
- Identify what climate actions other staff might be well-placed to be responsible for (based on their interests and role in the school)

Pre-discussion activities

What passions and interests cross over with climate action?

Have a think about what interests and passions people might have that cross over with climate action.

- e.g. cycling, science, hiking, technology, woodwork, DIY, cooking, gardening, sewing

Think about your own passion, interests and skills – if you could successfully implement one major climate related project in your school what would it be?

Write down:

- Why you would choose that project
- Who in your setting would benefit from it
- Who you would need to work with to achieve it

What are you passionate about?

Discussion

Top tips

- Make independent notes before or during the session on each question to enable you to share all your individual ideas
- Draw on your Climate Ambassador's training on how to resolve some of the 'people challenges' that you may come across in engaging the school community; you can also come to our peer-to-peer learning sessions for further support

Questions

What actions might other staff members be interested in implementing?

What are staff, parents or learners passionate about personally or as a community that have a crossover with climate action?

Think about:

- Their own hobbies and interests
- Clubs or extracurricular activities
- Local community or school challenges e.g. air pollution, food poverty

What areas of climate action sit within the roles and responsibilities of different staff in your setting?

Think about:

- Site/ estates manager
- Catering staff
- Subject leaders
- Leadership

How can climate action support or be a part of other staff responsibilities?

Identify potential allies

Who could you speak to about implementing climate action in your school?

Think about:

- Aligning with their interests
- Aligning with their role and responsibilities
- Areas where change can be made

Reflection and tasks

What do staff think?

Speak to staff on your list about what you discovered in this session.

This could involve asking them:

- What climate actions they might be interested in
- How climate action crosses-over with their current responsibilities

Read through [this resource](#) and resources it links to on how various programmes sit in different areas of responsibility in the setting.

- Highlight any which might be relevant for your setting
- Highlight any which other staff might be interested in

Actions by role and responsibility

Step three checklist

We have drawn up a list of staff who could get involved in taking climate action based on their role and interests	
We have held initial conversations with staff on cross-overs between climate action and their area of work or interests	
We have drawn up an initial list of programmes and opportunities that are relevant to our setting and staff who might be interested in them	



Step four:

Action across the pillars

These pre-session activities are designed to be done independently by either the Climate Ambassador or Sustainability Lead. Start by both reading through the goals and the activities and deciding who will be responsible for completing each one.

Step four goals

- Understand what types of action a school can take under the four DfE pillars of climate action
- Identify which actions are relevant for your school
- Identify which actions contribute to achieving your school-specific goals
- Identify which actions are feasible to achieve in the next year

Pre-discussion activities

Initial ideas for actions across the pillars

Read through [the action lists](#) and reflect on the actions you discovered in the previous step.

Make a list of which ones are possible to implement in your school if time, cost and capacity were not an issue.

Reflecting on your school specific goals under the pillars; research specific actions or initiatives that could contribute to achieving those goals.

Actions to achieve your school's goals

Discussion

Top tips

- Make independent notes before or during the session on each question so you can share your individual ideas
- Remember: your climate action plan is part of a long-term journey your school will take on sustainability. Part of the initial work you do may be identifying challenges that need to be resolved this year before further action can take place

Questions

Actions for the short term

What are the first 5-10 actions your setting could get started on right away?

Think about:

- Who would be responsible
- What resources you may need
- What time frame they will take to complete

Considering your own research, the programmes you identified and the action lists, what are 5-10 longer-term actions that could be possible to implement in your school?

Think about:

- Which actions best contribute to your school-specific goals
- Who would need to be involved to make them happen
- What resources/funding you will need

What are the longer-term actions your setting could take?

Which actions should you speak to other staff about?

From your longer list of actions, identify which ones you would like to approach other staff or school leadership to discuss.

Think about:

- Which actions overlap with your setting's improvement plan
- Which actions individual staff might be interested in implementing
- Which actions other staff could take full responsibility for implementing

Reflection and tasks

Presenting opportunities to other members of the school community

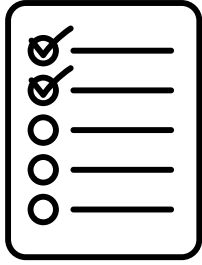
Email or speak to the other staff members and leadership about the programmes and actions you identified. Find out if they would like to get involved or lead on implementing them.

Reflect on the longer-term actions you identified, identify the first step that could be achieved in the short-term to work towards implementing that action long-term (e.g. researching solar initiatives, organising a fundraiser for tree planting).

Reaching your vision

Step four checklist

	We have a list of short term actions our school could take across the pillars	
	We have a list of long-term actions our school could take across the pillars	
	We have held conversations with staff on specific actions and programmes they could get involved with or lead on	
	We have identified the first steps we would need to take to achieve those long-term actions	



Step five: Writing your CAP

These pre-discussion activities are designed to be done independently by either the Climate Ambassador or Sustainability lead. Start by both reading through the goals of this step and the activities and deciding who will be responsible for completing each one.

Step five goals

- Fill in the CAP template with actions you will take this year
- Identify existing challenges and support that would be needed to involve more school members in your CAP in the future

Pre-discussion activities

Short-term actions across the pillars

Fill in the details of short-term actions your school could take across the pillars.

Look through the actions you have listed to take this year. Do you have actions under each pillar? If not, review the action lists again to see if there are actions your school could take under that pillar.

Actions across all the pillars

Discussion

Top tips

- Make independent notes before or during the session on each question to enable you to share all your individual ideas
- The school leadership and Climate Ambassador are there to support bringing on board other members of staff and school community: lean on them to resolve challenges you may face

Questions

Challenges to involving the school community

What are the challenges you are facing to bringing on specific members of staff or the school community to be responsible for actions in the plan?

Think about what might be preventing them from engaging. Is it a challenge of:

- Interest in the action?
- Confidence to take part?
- Time or capacity due to their role?

What would need to change in the school to enable more members of the school community to get involved in climate action?

Think about:

- How you could build their confidence to take action
- How you could inspire their interest to be involved
- How leadership or the school community could support finding time and capacity for this work

Unlocking change

Next steps

What actions are left to confirm in your CAP? What are the next steps to finalise the list of actions you will take this year?

Think about:

- Who you still need to speak to
- What information you still need to get for each action (e.g. timescale, resources)

Reflection and tasks

Confirm actions

Follow-up on and get the final information you need to fill in your CAP with actions that other school members will be responsible for.

Reflecting on your discussion, think about what actions you or the school leadership could take in the next year that will enable more of the school community to be responsible for actions in the future.

Building school capacity

Step five checklist

We have a list of the climate actions we will be responsible for and the resources and support we will need	
We have a list of actions across the pillars that our school will take this year and who will be responsible for them	
We have a list of challenges our school currently faces to taking climate action	
We have a list of ways in which we could build the skills and confidence of staff in our school to take climate action	



Step six: Delivering the CAP

Step six goals

- Finalise your CAP with actions you will take this year
- Decide how your CAP will be reviewed annually
- Decide how you will introduce your finalised CAP to the wider school community
- Identify who you can go to for support if you get stuck implementing actions in your CAP

Pre-discussion activities

Fill in your CAP

Fill in your CAP with a first draft of actions your school will take across the four pillars.

Contact your school's senior leadership to organise a meeting to discuss your CAP following your final discussion.

Speaking to leadership

Discussion

Top tips

- Make independent notes before or during the session on each question to enable you to share all your individual ideas
- This discussion may be a good opportunity to clarify how you will work together following this programme including the ongoing support the Climate Ambassador could provide.

Questions

Reviewing the climate action plan

When will you be reviewing the CAP?

Think about:

- When and how often you could review the plan with other staff
- When and how you can review progress with senior leadership
- When you will update the CAP with new actions

Who can help if you get stuck trying to implement actions?

Think about:

- Your school community - including governors, parents and colleagues
- Support that external programmes or networks can provide
- Support that your Climate Ambassador or the regional hub in London programme can provide

Who can I go to if I get stuck?

Showcase your work

Where can you introduce the climate action plan?

Think about:

- How and where you can present it to learners and school staff (e.g. assemblies, website, presentations)
- How and where you can present to parents and the wider school community

Reflection and tasks

Speak to leadership

Have your meeting with leadership to review your finalised CAP. This meeting is to discuss:

- The long-term goals you have identified under each pillar
- The actions you think the school can take this year
- The actions you would like to take but don't feel feasible this year
- Opportunities to engage different members of the school community in ideas generation for actions to go in your CAP next year
- The challenges that have arisen in creating a whole-school approach to climate action in your school
- The support you identified would be needed to bring on board more of the school community in the future
- Where and how you are showcasing your CAP

Showcase your plan! This could involve putting it on your website, displaying it on a notice board, presenting it at an assembly or combination of them all.

Showcasing the CAP

Step six checklist

We have a finalised CAP with all sections completed	
The CAP has been discussed and signed off by school leadership	
Our CAP has been – or we have plans for it to be – showcased to learners, staff, parents/ care-givers and governors	

Overall programme checklist

We have filled in the first CAP section: 'What have we already achieved?'

We have filled in our school's unique long-term goals under each pillar

We have planned at least three climate actions our school will take under each pillar, including filling in the section on timescale, resources, measures of success and people involved

We have a list of challenges we have faced in creating the CAP and bringing on board staff and the wider school community

We have a list of potential ways we can support more of the school community to engage in climate action in the future

We have a list of potential programmes or actions that we cannot achieve this year but would like to in the future

We have created at least one opportunity for learners to engage in ideas generation for actions our school could take across the pillars

We have identified opportunities in the school calendar in which we can engage staff, learners and the wider school community in development of our climate action plan and completed this section in our CAP template

We have plans in place, and have discussed with leadership about when and how we will review our CAP annually

We have showcased our completed CAP to the wider school community including other staff, learners, parents and governors

We have a list of people or organisations within and outside of our school who can support us if we get stuck in implementing the CAP

Support available for implementing your climate action plan

The Climate Ambassadors programme

The London regional hub of the Climate Ambassadors programme can continue to support you in delivering your climate action plan. If you have a particular question or challenge you would like support on you can sign-up to our open question sessions [here](#).

If you would like expert support to help with a particular area of your climate action plan, we can assist through matching you with a Climate Ambassador that can support your specific needs. Examples of this could be advice from an expert in energy efficiency or flood adaptation, or an experienced sustainability professional to speak at a green skills event.

Finally, we will be running workshops to support you in different areas of skill gaps that you might need support with to implement your climate action plan. These currently include adaptation to flood and heat risk, grant-writing support and building a sustainability working group in your setting. To find out more about these workshops, please speak to your Climate Ambassador.

Peer support

Joining a local network for Sustainability Leads can be a great way to get local support for implementing your CAP and generating ideas for future actions your school could take.

Most Local Authorities in London run termly meetings for Sustainability Leads – you can take a look online to see if you can find one locally. There are also networks such as the [London Schools Eco Network](#) if you would like to join a London-wide network.

You can also reach us via email to organise a meeting where you can speak to one of the team about any challenges you are facing to enable us to signpost you to the appropriate support. The Climate Ambassadors programme has several sister projects which may be able to help and we can potentially direct you to the right one based on your need.

Contacting the London regional hub of the Climate Ambassadors programme



Email: climateambassadors_london@ucl.ac.uk

Website: [Climate Ambassadors – the London Regional Hub](#)