



UHY Ross Brooke
Chartered Accountants

Understanding sustainability leadership

Guidance for academy trusts

Helping you prosper

Understanding sustainability leadership

In April 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) published the Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy for the education and children’s services systems. This followed extensive engagement with sector representatives, young people and sustainability and climate change experts, and sets an ambitious vision that the UK education sector would be a world leader in sustainability and climate change by 2030.

By 2025, all education settings, including academies, are expected to nominate a **sustainability lead** and implement a **climate action plan**.

Sustainability leadership involves integrating sustainable practices into the core operations and culture of educational institutions. We have developed this guide for our academy and education clients to provide clarity on what the requirements mean and how you might begin to address them.

Climate action plans

In order to meet the 2030 targets, your trust should start to develop a climate action plan which outlines the steps taken to reduce your carbon footprint and improve sustainability practices. The DfE have provided **detailed guidance** on developing a climate action plan following the publication of their **Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy for Education**, which includes an intended deadline: “By 2025: all education settings will have a nominated sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan”.

Guidance for creating a climate action plan

1. Establishing leadership and governance

Establishing a sustainability leadership team and appointing a sustainability lead is crucial. This team is responsible for implementing and monitoring sustainability initiatives as well as taking ownership of the climate action plan. Best practice shows that change is delivered when driven by a diverse team of passionate individuals. It is important that both educational and operational expertise is brought to this team.

Key steps:

- ✓ **Appoint a sustainability lead:** Nominate a dedicated sustainability lead within the academy to oversee the climate action plan.
- ✓ **Create a sustainability committee:** Form a committee that includes staff, students and community members to guide and support sustainability initiatives.

This is not a committee of the trustee board, but including trustees could be highly beneficial as they often bring valuable governance experience, strategic oversight and a commitment to the setting’s long-term goals. Their involvement can help ensure that sustainability initiatives are aligned with the overall mission and objectives of the educational institution.

2. Conducting an initial assessment

Creating a climate action plan allows you to take a structured and strategic route toward ensuring your trust is acting toward, and educating about, sustainability. You may choose to have a climate action plan that sits within an individual setting, across a trust, or both.

The guidance states that a climate action plan should cover the following four areas, to align with the DfE’s 2030 strategy:

1. Decarbonisation – a key step is calculating your total energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. This helps in identifying areas for improvement and tracking progress. Key considerations include:

- energy usage
- water usage
- waste management
- staff and pupil travel
- paper and technology consumption
- procurement.

It is important to understand the types of emissions (Scopes) that contribute to your carbon footprint. Get in touch with **our team** at UHY for assistance in measuring your carbon and carbon equivalent data.

2. Adaptation and resilience – building your knowledge of climate change and taking actions to reduce risks associated with extreme weather events, such as flooding and heatwaves, and be better prepared to deal with the negative effects of climate change.

3. Biodiversity – understanding biodiversity at your schools and building awareness. For example engaging with the **National Education Nature Park** launched in 2023, offering children and young people the opportunity for hands-on action improving diversity, learning data science skills and finding out about nature’s role in climate change.

You can encourage nature recovery and achieve a more sustainable natural environment by:

- planting trees
- practising nature-friendly maintenance
- opting for natural fencing
- introducing wildlife habitats
- increasing wildlife.

Case study

Greig City Academy in Haringey, London (UHY Hacker Young client) have been encouraging biodiversity through their beekeeping club. The club have welcomed a queen bee and thousands of worker bees to their hive, built by their D&T students. This was even recognised in the school’s latest Ofsted report: “In the beekeeping club, pupils from all year groups build a beehive, care for the bees and harvest and sell the honey.”

4. Integrating climate education and green careers – such as ensuring the education you provide gives knowledge-rich and comprehensive teaching about climate change, and that your teaching staff and lecturers feel supported to offer this. Incorporating sustainability into the curriculum helps students understand and engage with environmental issues. This can include hands-on projects as well as activities that promote sustainability.



3. Setting clear goals

It is essential to set clear goals by setting a baseline to measure progress, with the ultimate vision of 'net zero'. Net Zero means achieving a balance where the greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere are offset by an equivalent amount removed from the atmosphere. This effectively leaves no net increases in greenhouse gas emissions from your operations. This is typically achieved firstly through reducing emissions as far as possible and then removing those that remain.

For example, your trust is aiming to achieve net zero emissions. They've already reduced their carbon emissions significantly by using renewable energy and improving energy efficiency. However, you still have some unavoidable emissions. To net these, you can invest in a number of different solutions, for example:

Reforestation project: Planting trees to absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂) through photosynthesis on the school grounds. As the trees grow, they absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere through photosynthesis. The amount of CO₂ absorbed by the trees can be measured (there are a number of [online calculators](#) available) and your trust can then offset the amount of CO₂ removed against your remaining emissions, helping you to achieve your net zero goal.

This approach not only helps remove CO₂ from the atmosphere but also supports biodiversity, whilst providing shade for the grounds of the school which will become more and more important as temperatures increase with climate change.

Key steps:

- ✓ Define both immediate and future targets to create a clear roadmap towards net zero
- ✓ Establish a realistic timeline for implementing these actions
- ✓ Be prepared to adjust goals based on progress and new insights.

4. Implementing energy efficiency measures

You will need to determine the specific actions needed to reduce emissions, such as:

- **Carbon policy** – as discussed in section 2, it is essential to understand your emissions to be able to identify what actions could be taken to reduce them. Each trust's circumstances will be different, and you should consider which measures would be the most effective based on your organisation's individual needs, building condition and available resources. You could look at lower carbon alternatives to the use of gas in your setting, replacing gas boilers for example with ground sourced or air sourced heat pumps.

Case study

As an example of one option to decarbonise, **Inspire Education Trust** (UHY Hacker Young client) have shared a [case study](#) on installing Air Sourced Heat Pumps in Blue Coat Church of England School, Coventry, as part of their pathway to net zero.

- **Water management plan** – reducing water usage, including repairing leaks, installing low flow taps and lower flush volumes on toilet facilities and utilising rainwater.
- **Waste management plan** – to reduce and remove waste more efficiently. For operational waste, you should follow the [waste hierarchy](#) principles for your waste management plan. The waste hierarchy ranks waste management options, prioritising what is best for the environment. Bear in mind that in the new [mandatory recycling regulations](#) that came into place from 31 March 2025, all schools in England must comply with the new regulations.
- **Staff and pupil travel** – looking at how staff and pupils travel to school and school trip transport. Promoting low carbon commuting options such as cycling, walking, public transport or car sharing as opposed to driving individually.

- **Procurement** – including environmental, social and governance (ESG) credentials in supplier selection processes and consideration of sustainability of materials purchased. By requesting and understanding your supply chain's ESG metrics you are promoting sustainability across your value chain.

It is important that the whole education setting, or trust, including the trustees are engaged so that planning becomes action. This includes identifying key staff who affect energy use on site, such as catering staff, site staff and cleaners who will be essential in making sure plans are implemented.

5. Engaging stakeholders

Effective sustainability leadership requires the engagement of all stakeholders. This includes staff, trustees, students, parents and the local community.

Strategies for engagement:

- **Education and training** – Provide education and training on sustainability issues to increase awareness and build capacity among staff and students.
- **Communication** – Use various communication channels to share progress and encourage participation in sustainability initiatives.
- **Partnerships** – Develop partnerships with local organisations, businesses and other educational institutions to support sustainability efforts.

6. Accessing resources and support

The DfE offers various resources and support to help academies develop and implement their climate action plans:

[Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education - GOV.UK](#)

[Energy efficiency: guidance for the school and further education college estate - GOV.UK](#)

[Good estate management for schools - Sustainability of your estate - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

7. Monitoring and reporting

Your annual emissions report will be a key measure of celebrating progress. It is important to continuously review and update your plan to reflect new data, technologies and regulations.

It is recommended to report progress to stakeholders to maintain accountability – click here to see how Bourne Education Trust (UHY Hacker Young client) have made their commitment to ESG.

At UHY we are committed to providing support throughout your sustainability journey and annual reporting to help you monitor results.



The next step

At UHY Ross Brooke, our purpose is **helping you prosper** and, in building your sustainability strategy, a realistic, achievable and time bound climate action plan is key to your prosperity. We can begin by helping you calculate your baseline for your decarbonisation sustainability journey by measuring your current carbon emissions and helping you develop a climate action plan to advise your sustainability leads. Please do get in touch and start the conversation.

For any related enquiries, please get in touch with Emily Ness or Caroline Webster.



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