

26 June 2021

## **NZCER submission on the Climate Change Commission's draft advice to the Government**

This submission has been compiled by a team at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). Established in 1934, NZCER is Aotearoa New Zealand's independent research and development organisation, operating under its own legislation since 1945. NZCER's current strategic priorities include contributing to a socially just and equitable education system, improving education outcomes for every Māori learner, and leading thinking and shaping the future of education. As an organisation, we use the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa to help us uphold mana Māori in our work, relationships, and ways of working.

### **Our key messages**

- The Commission's report states the need for clear roles, expectations, and accountability mechanisms. We agree with this and support the Commission's direction. We endorse the specific inclusion of the education sector amongst other cross-sectoral policy-making agencies where efforts will need to be collaborative and coordinated.
- We think there is scope in the Climate Commission's advice to strengthen and highlight education's important role in supporting a just transition for all communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- We think the Commission's report could say more about honouring the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and education's role and contribution to a treaty-based climate response.
- We noted that the Climate Change Commission's report does not include any discussion of Aotearoa New Zealand's place and responsibilities in the Pacific.
- We recommend the Commission considers actions they could take to encourage a more strategic approach to supporting New Zealanders' learning and career pathways in a transitioning economy.

One of NZCER's current research projects has been investigating what system-wide educational response to climate change (policy and practice) could look like in Aotearoa New Zealand. (See <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/climate-change>). We recognise climate change response as a complex, intersectional issue, and that significant and lasting changes will be needed across society and the economy to address the global climate crisis in a just, equitable and sustainable way. We understand the importance of the Climate Change Commission's role in providing strong advice and recommendations to the New Zealand Government to ensure that we set appropriate goals and monitor our progress against these.

**We have read the Commission’s draft advice with a particular focus on what the report says about education.** We note that education is mentioned on 10 of the report’s 188 pages, and that both the Ministry of Education and Tertiary Education Commission are included in a list of 17 government agencies named on page 39 which will need to coordinate efforts to address climate change. The Commission’s report states that: *“The roles and expectations of each of these, and other agencies in addressing climate change will need to be clearly set out. The accountability mechanisms for delivery will also need to be defined”*.

**We support this direction, and the specific inclusion of the education sector amongst other cross-sectoral policy making that needs to be coordinated.** Our research, and international analyses of climate change education policies, indicate that it is very important to have clear, high-level direction about education’s role, responsibilities, and opportunities with respect to climate change, and for this direction to be supported by coherent policy design and resourcing. Globally, climate action agreements tend to frame education and training as playing a key role responding to climate change. However, in New Zealand as in many parts of the world, education policies are often not aligned to this call (Bieler et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2019), and “the education sector remains underexploited as a strategic resource to mitigate and adapt to climate change” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 66).

International models for “climate-ready” schooling (Chopin et al., 2018) identify the need for high-level strategic planning that weaves climate and sustainability thinking into all school practices, and decision making at every level. This includes engagement from school leadership and governance, as well as staff, students, and the wider school community. While there are currently some levers and supports for New Zealand schools, kura, tertiary and early learning centres to actively engage in responding to climate change, the onus to take active steps in this direction currently appears to sit with individual schools/learning centres, teachers, or students who choose—or do not choose—to make this a focus (Bolstad, 2020a).

**We think there is scope in the Climate Commission’s advice to strengthen and highlight education’s important role in supporting a just transition for all communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.** This includes highlighting opportunities for the education sector to lead thinking, support innovation, and support young people and communities through the transition process. Our research, and other New Zealand and international research, highlights the role that schools and learning centres can play in building community resilience, empowering and mobilising children and young people’s creative and adaptive problem-solving capabilities, and supporting localised innovation in response to climate and sustainability knowledge (See Bolstad, 2020a).

The Commission’s report identifies that part of creating a fair, equitable, inclusive transition means *“honouring the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi”* and *“working collaboratively and inclusively when planning the transition and developing and implementing policy, in line with kotahitanga and tikanga”*. (p. 80). Education can play a role in supporting learners and communities to understand how Tiriti principles and obligations can be upheld as Aotearoa New Zealand transitions to a low-emissions future (Bargh, 2019), and unpack the relationships between climate change and colonisation (Jones, 2019). Education can also support deeper engagement with indigenous knowledge systems and mātauranga Māori, and help learners

to understand why supporting indigenous peoples' rights and self-determination is part of climate justice. Our research suggests that these dimensions are currently underdeveloped in current approaches to climate change education (Bolstad, 2020a, 2020b). **We think the Commission's report could say more about this aspect of education's role and contribution to the climate response, recognising that the education sector will need support and guidance to upskill and build knowledge in these areas.**

Climate change education can also build awareness about Aotearoa New Zealand's connections to the wider world, the impacts that global climate change has for different people and groups, and global economic and social justice issues associated with this. We noted that the Climate Change Commission's report does not include any discussion of Aotearoa New Zealand's place and responsibilities in the Pacific. The report does not talk about Pacific Nations, which are strongly impacted by climate change, and contains only a few references to Pasifika peoples living in Aotearoa New Zealand, most often appearing in lists of marginalised/disadvantaged groups. This does not adequately reflect the important contribution that Pacific peoples, including Pacific rangatahi, have made as climate activists and leaders of climate and environmental movements.

Climate change is a complex matter. The non-linear and unpredictable behaviour of complex systems, including the climate system(s), is not well understood by the general public. In consequence, the urgency of the need for change is often downplayed or ignored (Tasquier et al., 2014). With appropriate resourcing, our education system would be well placed to teach young people about complex systems and to build dispositions for complex systems thinking. Many of the concepts in this field are counter-intuitive and it is unlikely students will gain the relevant insights elsewhere. Changes in curriculum and current teaching practice would be needed to realise this opportunity (Drake et. al., 2017; Hipkins, in press).

Finally, the Commission's report discusses (p.96) the role of the education system in ensuring New Zealanders "are set up with the skills that are needed in the labour market", and "needed in the future", through pre-employment training *and* lifelong learning. Our research suggests that New Zealand learners are likely to learn about the causes and impacts of climate change but have few opportunities to learn about work and career pathways for a low-carbon future (Bolstad, 2020b). We see this as another important call to action for the education sector. The education sector in turn will need access to high-quality knowledge, advice, support, and partnerships from those who are on the leading edges of transition within other sectors (including science, business and industry, etc.), opportunities to redesign curriculum and assessment structures so that they are suited to the needs of a transitioning Aotearoa New Zealand. Without this, it will be difficult to provide accurate and timely knowledge and guidance to support young people and learners of all ages towards pathways in a transitional and zero-carbon future for Aotearoa New Zealand. **We recommend the Commission considers actions they could take to encourage a more strategic approach to supporting New Zealanders' learning and career pathways in a transitioning economy.**

**About NZCER's climate change research: *Educational policy and practice for a changing climate: What are the options?***

Our research project explores what changes or adaptations our education system may need to make in response to climate change. We publish research reports, articles and blogs.

Connect with the project and access all reports and project outputs here:

<https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/climate-change>

## References

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