

24 November 2021

NZCER submission on the Emissions Reduction Plan (ERP)

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 decolonising education, upholding mana Māori, whakamana Māori, improving equity for ākonga and equity in education, and influencing the future of education. As a research and development organisation, we are committed to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We value the importance of Māori language, culture, and identity in all our practices.

1. Our key messages

- 1.1. The education sector needs to see itself clearly in the ERP.
- 1.2. Education's contribution to climate transition is often overlooked.
- 1.3. Aotearoa New Zealand needs a comprehensive education sector strategy for climate change and sustainability.
- 1.4. With Government support, education settings are ideal sites for normalising low-emissions practices.
- 1.5. With Government support, education settings can support the realisation of the guiding principles for the transition.
- 1.6. **Our key recommendation for the ERP** is to include a clear statement about the role and contribution of the education sector, as a whole, to New Zealand's climate response and a just transition to a zero-carbon future. This should be supported by the development of a comprehensive strategy and action plan for education co-designed with the education sector.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. NZCER recognises the significant and imminent threat that climate change poses to the lives and wellbeing of people in Aotearoa, in the Pacific, and globally. With little time left to reverse the current trajectory and keep global temperature rise below +1.5°C, climate action is more urgent than ever. In response, NZCER supports a just transition to a low-emissions zero-carbon economy in Aotearoa New Zealand.

- 2.2. As acknowledged in the Discussion document, the government's Emissions Reduction Plan is incomplete and requires input and feedback. We welcome the opportunity to contribute - in particular, to strengthen the limited attention given to the contribution that the education sector can make to emissions reduction, and a just transition to a zero-carbon future.
- 2.3. Our key recommendation for the Emissions Reduction Plan is to include a clear statement about the role and contribution of the education sector, as a whole, to New Zealand's climate response and a just transition to a zero-carbon future. Our expectation is that the education sector, including education unions, educational institutions, teachers and school leaders, and learners of all ages, will be engaged in the process of social dialogue and co-design of strategies and actions for an urgent, ambitious, just and inclusive transition to a zero-carbon future.

3. The education sector needs to see itself clearly in the ERP

- 3.1. Education does not have its own section in the ERP discussion document. However, education is mentioned 25 times, and the need for New Zealanders to develop and acquire new skills is mentioned 18 times. The words learning and training each appear 3 times. Schools are mentioned 13 times, but tertiary education is not discussed at all.
- 3.2. It is important that the education sector can see itself clearly represented in the final Emissions Reduction Plan, and in other government plans for Aotearoa New Zealand's just transition to a low-emissions, climate-changed future. The transition to a low-emissions future is not just a scientific, economic, and technological transition. It is also a major social and cultural transition, and education can play a central role.

4. Education's contribution to climate transition is often overlooked

- 4.1. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change clearly signals that education has a key role in climate transition, "enabling society to be part of the solution".¹ New Zealand and international research shows that there is often a disconnect between climate policy and education policy.² Consequently, education sector policies in most countries – including New Zealand - are currently inadequate to

¹ See Article 6 of UNFCCC, [Education and Training under Article 6 | UNFCCC](#)

² See Bieler, A., Haluza-Delay, R., Dale, A., & McKenzie, M. (2017). A national overview of climate change education policy: Policy coherence between subnational climate and education policies in Canada (K-12). *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, 11(2), 63–85.

support and enable the powerful potential role of education to be realised as a key lever for climate mitigation, adaptation, and just transition.³

- 4.2. However, the needle is beginning to shift. At COP26, some countries' Ministers of Education made significant pledges and commitments on climate change education. UK's Secretary of State for Education announced a draft education strategy⁴ for sustainability and climate change. Stating that "education is critical to fighting climate change" (p.4), the draft strategy includes a vision that, "The United Kingdom is the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030", and maps out a "whole-system approach" to achieving this, including commitments around resources and training for teachers, support for green skills and careers, emissions-reduction and adaptation in school buildings and properties, sustainable operations and supply chains, and leadership opportunities for learners.
- 4.3. Italy's Ministers of Education and Ecological Transition also spoke at COP26 about the crucial role of education, linking climate education to the core values of peace, democracy, and collaboration, and calling for transformational approaches. As the Italian Minister expressed it, "*We have to transform our schools, and to consider that we have the opportunity to start from environmental crisis and climate crisis to build up a new world – starting from the school*".
- 4.4. Ministers from other countries also made various pledges and commitments on education, including Finland, Sri Lanka, Andorra, Cameroon, Spain, Nicaragua, Greece, Scotland, Malawi, Colombia, Japan, The Commonwealth, North Macedonia, Jersey, Sierra Leone, Gibraltar, Korea, Armenia. New Zealand was not among the countries that made education pledges at COP26.
- 4.5. Education unions across the world have mobilised around commitments to climate change education and education for sustainable development in the Paris Agreement (article 12) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (targets 4.7, 12.8 and 13.3). Educators in the Asia-Pacific have jointly called for an urgent commitment from all governments to provide quality climate change education.⁵

5. Aotearoa New Zealand needs a comprehensive education sector strategy for climate change and sustainability

- 5.1. Aotearoa New Zealand currently lacks a comprehensive education sector strategy for climate change. Such a strategy would include clear goals and actions for

³ See Marcia McKenzie (2021) Climate change education and communication in global review: tracking progress through national submissions to the UNFCCC Secretariat, *Environmental Education Research*, 27:5, 631-651, DOI: [10.1080/13504622.2021.1903838](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2021.1903838)

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-puts-climate-change-at-the-heart-of-education-2>

⁵ See <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/25410:educators-in-asia-pacific-call-for-an-urgent-commitment-to-quality-climate-change-education>

emissions reduction. More than this, it would address the holistic educational needs of all learners in Aotearoa New Zealand (at any age or stage of life) in a just transition to a low-emissions, climate-changed future.

- 5.2. The ERP talks about “behaviour change and empowering action”, but alongside strategies to support “the public” to make changes, New Zealand needs a comprehensive education strategy that supports learners of all ages to deepen and extend their knowledge, skills, and capabilities needed for the transition.
- 5.3. In Aotearoa, education for transitions to a safe climate future must be underpinned by a commitment to genuine Tiriti partnerships in which mana whenua exercise their right to kaitiakitanga.
- 5.4. A comprehensive education sector strategy must recognise and address specific educational equity issues that could work against the goals of an equitable, fair, and just transition. The Climate Change Commission’s report⁶ states that *“the Government needs to address existing barriers resulting from historical injustices, for example, Māori experience persisting inequalities in education and skill levels, influenced by the cumulative effects of colonisation and structural systems that advantage non-Māori”*(p.332). The report identifies the need to address these inequities in partnership with Māori: *“Education and training developed by Māori, for Māori, will be important for reducing existing inequities”*(p.160)
- 5.5. Other equity issues must be recognised and addressed in a comprehensive education sector strategy to support a just transition:
 - 5.5.1. Climate education in Aotearoa must recognise and respond to the severe impacts of climate change on Pacific nations and for Pacific peoples, and recognise the existing educational and employment inequities and impacts of climate change for Pacific peoples.
 - 5.5.2. Climate education in Aotearoa must recognise the existing educational and employment inequities and impacts of climate change for disabled people.
 - 5.5.3. Climate education in Aotearoa must recognise that children and young people and future generations have contributed the least to the climate crisis and will carry the heaviest burden. Education must work against conventional practices and structures that limit children’s and young people’s rights to participate in decision-making that affects them and their futures.
- 5.6. A just transition is necessary for workers in jobs and industries that will be highly affected by the shift to a low-emissions future, and their whānau and communities. Access to high-quality, locally-accessible lifelong learning and tertiary education is critical to support working people to develop new skills and capabilities for the future of work in a low-emissions economy.

⁶ New Zealand Government (2021). *Ināia tonu nei: a low emissions future for Aotearoa Advice to the New Zealand Government on its first three emissions budgets and direction for its emissions reduction plan 2022 – 2025*. Wellington.

- 5.7. An education strategy for a climate-changed, zero-carbon future must support active engagement in solutions-focussed, civically engaged, children and youth-centred approaches to climate transitions.
- 5.8. Quality climate change education will support the empowerment of local communities to collaborate to develop localised solutions and safe, healthy, climate-resilient, low-carbon communities, towns, and cities.
- 5.9. Education for a climate-changed, zero-carbon future is critical to the future stability of Aotearoa as an effective and peaceful democracy, in a future where we will increasingly need to find peaceful solutions to conflicts arising from climate change.
- 5.10. These skills need to be learned and practised in formal and informal education spaces. Educational environments should model positive climate action, nurture hope, and help rangatahi to be emotionally resilient as they work towards a just transition. Understanding the emotional aspects of climate change – and the different ways in which people respond to complexity, uncertainty, and change/transition is key, as it drives willingness to engage in action, for people of all ages and stages of life.

6. Education settings are ideal sites for normalising low-emissions practices

- 6.1. Education settings are ideal sites for implementing and normalising emissions-reducing actions and activities that model the “new normal” for a low-emissions Aotearoa New Zealand. Some education settings already engage in emissions-reducing practices that cut across most, if not all, of the areas covered in the ERP discussion document (transport, energy, waste, afforestation). However, education settings are often constrained in the extent to which they are able to reduce their own carbon emissions. They need systemic changes, and systemic supports, to achieve their goals and ambitions for decarbonisation.
- 6.2. Our research⁷ shows that while students, teachers, and school leaders are generally concerned about climate change and want to do something about it, often, where fantastic things are happening on the ground, it is because of the vision and commitment of passionate teachers, school leaders, students, and their communities who chose to make this a focus. It is not systemic. Teachers, school leaders, and students have identified a lack of “top-down” direction and leadership

⁷ See Bolstad, R. (2020a), *Climate change and sustainability in primary and intermediate schools: Findings from the 2019 NZCER national survey of English-medium schools*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research.; Bolstad, R. (2020b). *Opportunities for education in a changing climate: Themes from key informant interviews*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18296/rep.0006>; Bolstad, R. (2020c). *Climate change and sustainability in secondary schools: Findings from a 2020 survey of English-medium secondary and composite schools*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18296/rep.0006>

to signal that climate change, and effective responses to climate change, are a priority for the education sector.

6.3. Education settings are ideal settings for building learners' and communities' understanding of, and ability to participate in, circular systems. The education sector is also crucial to supporting research and innovation that is critical for supporting Aotearoa New Zealand and its people to thrive in a zero-emissions, yet climate-changed, future.

7. Education settings can support the realisation of the guiding principles for the transition

7.1. Education settings can support learners of all ages to engage with, and understand the principles the Government has set out to guide the transition:

- A fair, equitable, and inclusive transition
- An evidence-based approach
- Environmental and social benefits beyond emissions reduction
- Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- A clear, ambitious and [achievable]⁸ path

7.2. Education settings can model these principles in practice through learning and co-design with learners, educators, and communities. 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, and unpack the relationships between climate change and colonisation.

7.3. 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.⁹ Support for teachers, including initial teacher education and in-service professional learning and development, will be an important part of a comprehensive education strategy.

7.4. There are significant opportunities to strengthen and connect climate education and just transition to the current refresh of the New Zealand Curriculum, including linkages with the new Aotearoa New Zealand's histories curriculum and the overarching goal of a curriculum that is bicultural, inclusive, and easy to use.

7.5. Comprehensive and strategic investment from the Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Commission is needed to support education settings to put these principles into practice.

⁸ We recommend using the word "achievable" rather than affordable.

⁹ See footnote 7.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. The climate crisis is the greatest threat facing humanity and our planet. Education must be transformed to catalyse the fight against climate change and to support a just transition to a more sustainable world. Those most affected by climate change - particularly iwi Māori and Pacific Islands people's communities - must have a seat at the table. Children and young people must be involved in the decisions and actions that will shape their futures.
- 8.2. The education sector can and should play a central role in Aotearoa New Zealand's climate response. NZCER supports bold and ambitious action for a just transition to a zero-carbon future that engages the education sector, learners of all ages, communities, and working people as co-designers and decision-makers in plans to reduce New Zealand's carbon emissions.

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>