

**Re:** British and Irish Teaching Unions call for quality Climate Education

**Tuesday, 2 November 2021**

Open Letter

The British and Irish Group of Teacher Unions (BIGTU) collectively represents almost one million education practitioners and staff, all of whom are committed to the children and young people we teach and support. We are passionate about children's development and in the role of educator, take great responsibility to prepare the students for the future.

Our twenty-first century world faces major social and environmental problems on a global scale. Faced with this unprecedented challenge, a collective effort is needed to radically bring about a low-carbon transition. As reported by Education International in its recent analysis of 73 updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) presented for the COP, no country is doing enough to meet the criteria - the United Kingdom ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> out of 73 countries, while the EU (including the Republic of Ireland ranks 53<sup>rd</sup>. This is a cause of deep concern for us as General Secretaries of education unions.

We recognise the need to rethink education as part of the overall solution. In the words of Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Therefore, it is imperative that education systems are strengthened to face the climate crisis through increased funding, improved infrastructure, and continuous professional development for teachers.

The aforementioned report notes that only seven of the 73 NDCs refer to teachers (not including the UK and Ireland) and none mention engaging teachers or teacher unions as a climate stakeholder group. BIGTU is alarmed teachers and education systems have been overlooked in these critical national climate action plans.

As Ireland delivers its National Statement on Climate Change and the UK Department of Education (DfE) Sustainability Unit announces its strategy this week as part of COP 26, BIGTU reiterates our call on the UK Government, the Governments of the devolved administrations, and the Irish Government to work up to the vision outlined by Education International in its Manifesto for climate education to ensure that Climate Change Education is fully embedded in our education systems.

We have previously highlighted a number of specific actions that we believe must be addressed to enable significant, sustainable change and we take this opportunity to restate our key demands.

1. Governments ensure quality climate change education (CCE) for all.
2. Every student transitions from formal education climate-literate and equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to tackle climate change, adapt to uncertainties, and take part in building a more sustainable future.
3. Quality climate change education is based on science, and addresses the ethical, cultural, political, social, and economic dimensions of climate change.
4. Teachers are trained and supported to provide quality climate change education.
5. Schools and learning environments are transformed, to support quality climate change education.

Our committed educators are agents of change and can be at the forefront of the fight against climate change but in order to realise the goals of our action plans, they must have access to the resources and environments required to do so.

We are in an extremely precarious situation that demands immediate action. It is our hope, therefore, that you consider our views, as the voice of the teaching profession to initiate change in a timely manner.

Signed by:

Larry Flanagan, General Secretary, Education Institute of Scotland (EIS), Chairperson  
BIGTU

John Boyle, General Secretary, Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), Secretary,  
BIGTU

Mary Bousted, Joint General Secretary, National Education Union (NEU)

Jo Grady, General Secretary, University and College Union (UCU)

Jacque White, General Secretary, Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU)

Kieran Christie, General Secretary, Association of Secondary Teachers' in Ireland (ASTI)

Frank Jones, General Secretary, Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT)

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