

# The Compass Project: Guiding minds and inspiring action in climate change and mental health

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# Climate change and mental health are two of the greatest global challenges and are closely linked



Climate change can worsen mental health challenges and increase chances of new ones



Climate change can worsen conditions we need for good mental health

*E.g., air pollution, healthcare, jobs, education*



Distress from learning about climate change can be healthy and help drive action. But it can also be a risk to mental health .

Thompson & Lawrance et al. 2023, Climate Council of Australia 2023,

IPCC 2023, Lawrance et al., 2022, Ojala et al., 2021, Ogunbode et al. 2021 & 2022, Lawrance & Newberry Le Vay et al., 2024

# Young people can experience unique mental health risks

Mental health professionals, educators and young people themselves report **rising rates of climate anxiety among young people**.

This is made worse by:

- Feeling betrayed by people in power
- Lack of opportunity to take part in decision making and for young people's voices to be heard
- Feeling the weight of responsibility for dealing with the climate crisis



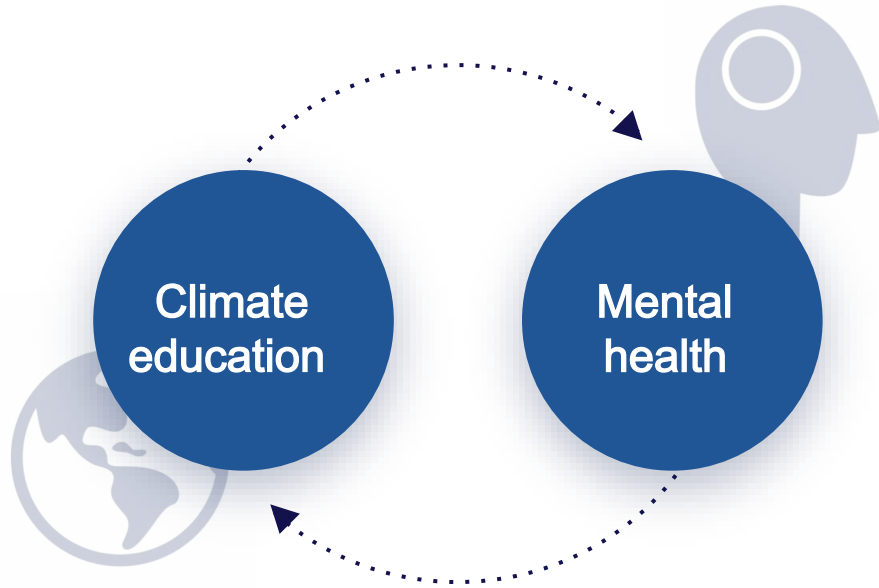
(Pearson, 2023; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2020; Lawrence et al., 2022; Hickman et al., 2021)

“Our climate - related feelings can be **intense and even deeply disruptive** . However, rather than being signs of dysfunction, uncomfortable climate - related feelings often have enormous value...

Together, our climate - related feelings **connect** us to like - minded people, they **motivate** our action, they remind us of our care for both other people and the natural world, and they **guide us** as we think about the better future we would like to create.”

Diffey et al., 2022





The skills, knowledge and resiliencies  
that are needed for both...align!



# The Compass Project

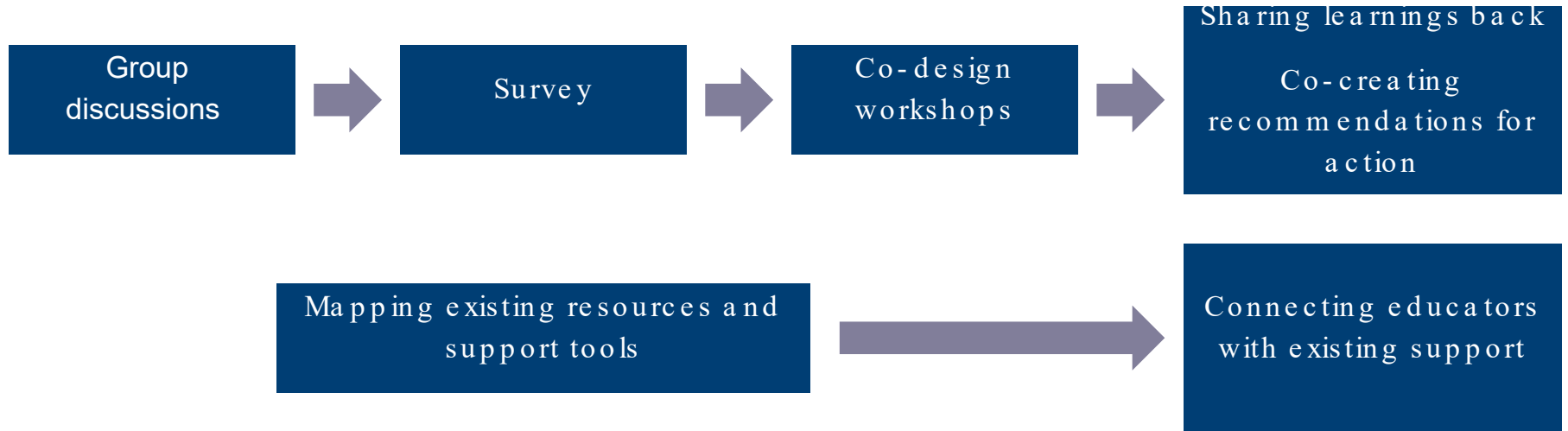
What would success look like to equip young people with knowledge, tools, resilience and agency to thrive in an changing future, take collective climate action, and work in climate careers?

How do we get there?

What are young people and educators experiencing now?



# The Compass Project



Convening experts globally to share learnings, foster connection & shape evidence-building

Youth and Educator Advisory Boards

## 1. AUDIENCE

# Who have we heard from?

- Students and educators in **schools, colleges and universities** in England
- Six online group discussions: **46 people**
- Online survey: **200 people**
- **15** student and educator project **advisors**



## 2. CURRENT

# What are young people experiencing now?

In schools & colleges...

**15%** of students (16-19) felt their education **prepares them for a future** in a changing climate.

**37%** of students said their school/college/university **reflects their own values** about the environment & climate change.

**43%** of students said their experience of climate education includes **opportunities to learn or talk about emotions or mental health...**

... but only **13%** said these were **formal/organised** opportunities.

## 2. CURRENT

# What are educators experiencing now?

In schools & colleges...

**46%** Said climate change & environment comes up **always or most of the time in their work** with students

**46%** Had training/professional development about the environment & climate change...

... **67%** said this training mentioned mental health.

**64%** Said their work with students about climate change includes **opportunities to learn or talk about emotions or mental health...**

... but only **9%** said these were **formal/organised** opportunities.

## 2. CURRENT

# Many things already work well

“I've been involved in facilitating **[climate cafes]**... It's been a really useful process for me... **I've taken some of that into my teaching** around sustainability and created moments when you're actually dealing with some of the really difficult content.”

*University **educator***

“[The university] introduced a **paid student-led position**, sustainability champions, where they encourage students to come up with their own projects related to climate action and environmental justice. A lot of events, career events, mental health events, more inclusive workshops around climate justice have cropped up because of this.”

*University **student***

## 2. CURRENT

# A need for change

“One major obstacle is the prevailing perception of climate change as solely a scientific or political issue, rather than a **deeply emotional and psychological one.**”

*School student*

“We want to teach about climate change. But there's anxiety for the educator to say, what if I set some sort of **chain reaction of concern** amongst these children, how do I deal with that?”

*School educator*

### 3. FUTURE

# How can education empower young people to live, act and thrive in a changing climate?

Students and educators envision a future where education prioritises:

- **Centering** mental health and wellbeing
- **Intergenerational** support and action
- Learning about **wider connections** (between social, economic and political systems)
- Connecting with **nature**
- Connecting with **climate action**
- Equipping young people for the **future** (e.g., relevant skills)

*While these things are happening, they are **generally limited** and in small pockets*

### 3. FUTURE

## How do we get there?

### Most important pathways...

Making learning about climate change **inspiring, focused on solutions, and relatable**

Making **climate action** accessible and engaging

Time with **nature**

### Most possible pathways...

Time with **nature**

Climate change and mental health **in every subject**

Giving **space to talk** about climate emotions

Making learning about climate change **inspiring, focused on solutions, and relatable**

## 4. ACCOUNTABILITY

# What are the barriers to progress?

<b><u>Students</u></b> say this is made harder by:	<b><u>Educators</u></b> say this is made harder by:
<b>Low priority</b>	<b>Low priority</b>
<b>Bigger problems in society</b>	<b>Bigger problems in society</b>
<b>Misinformation &amp; stigma</b>	<b>Lack of climate action leadership</b>
<b>Feeling powerless</b>	<b>Lack of time</b>
	<b>Lack of educator support</b>

## 4. ACCOUNTABILITY

# Who is responsible for driving change?

Students and educators said the most important groups were:

- **Government** (79% of participants)
- **Senior leaders in schools, colleges and universities** (69%)
- **Educators** (62%)
- **Students** (58%)

Some said... **everyone!**

## 5. IMPACT

# How are we sharing what we are learning?

- **Report** (December 2025)
- **Toolkit for educators**
- **With young people** (co-created outputs)
- **With UK government**
- **Globally** (*Conference of Youth and UN climate change conference (COP30) in November*)