

Schools for Sustainable Futures

Information and guidance

A free, year-long accredited programme providing in-person professional development and bespoke UCL mentoring to support innovative climate change, nature and sustainability education across the curriculum.

Introduction to the *Schools for Sustainable Futures* programme

The ***Schools for Sustainable Futures*** (SSF) programme supports schools to embed climate change, nature and sustainability across the curriculum in ways that are meaningful and engaging for teachers and young people. It has been developed by UCL in collaboration with schools and is now being launched as a full-scale pilot for 2026-27.

A central principle of the programme is flexibility: schools are encouraged to adopt approaches that suit their context, from small-scale, subject-based projects to whole-school initiatives. Whichever approach is chosen, the project should connect to one or more of UCL's outcomes for young people:

Young people should be supported to:

- Develop a connection with the natural world
- Understand the interconnectedness of the Earth
- Contribute to building a more socially just, equitable and compassionate world
- Challenge misinformation about the climate and ecological crises
- Act positively for the natural environment to build a more sustainable future

The ***Schools for Sustainable Futures*** programme complements UCL's sister programme, ***Teaching for Sustainable Futures***, a suite of one-hour, online professional development modules tailored by subject and age-phase and designed to help teachers embed climate change, nature and sustainability education into their lessons in manageable and inspiring ways.

The principles underpinning the *Schools for Sustainable Futures* programme

- Every subject plays a distinctive role** in helping young people understand and respond to the climate and nature crises, enhancing both the subject and students' overall understanding.
- Knowledge is essential, but so are skills and values.** Young people should not only understand issues relating to climate change, nature and sustainability, but care about others and the natural world, feel able to take action and think creatively and collaboratively about building a more just and sustainable future.

c. **Participatory teaching approaches, with a strong emphasis on oracy, are vital.** Effective learning about issues of climate change and sustainability requires opportunities for discussion, the application of knowledge, and creative approaches which may include learning outside the classroom.

d. **All teachers are curriculum makers** who can shape how issues relating to climate change, nature and sustainability are taught, whether through small or significant changes. UCL's work focuses on supporting teachers to make meaningful impact through their classroom practice.

e. **The programme must be manageable and affordable.** Schools are supported to choose approaches that balance ambition with realistic expectations and staff capacity.

f. **Schools for Sustainable Futures is a partnership between schools and UCL.** By working collaboratively and learning from diverse approaches, the programme contributes to a deeper understanding of how climate change, nature and sustainability can be embedded across the curriculum.

How does the programme work?

The programme runs initially for one academic year, with opportunities for continued involvement thereafter. **At its core is a curriculum innovation project developed by each school with support from a UCL partner (rather like a mentor) and the wider Schools for Sustainable Futures community.** Projects can range from small-scale (for example, a short sequence of lessons in one or two subjects) to whole-school initiatives but should be manageable and achievable within the year. Schools will collect light-touch evidence of impact to inform a case study for the UCL website, with support from their UCL partner.

A Project Lead should be identified and supported by a small Steering Group. This may be just one additional colleague in smaller schools or several members of staff in larger schools.

This is the project timeline for 2026-27:

- **13 July 2026** – Applications submitted
- **17 July 2026** – Schools notified of outcomes
- **24 September 2026** – One-day in-person introductory event at UCL
- **October 2026–June 2027** – Regular online check-ins with a UCL partner, opportunities to share progress with other schools, and one school visit from the UCL partner
- **July 2027**– Celebratory in-person event (venue tbc)



Schools that complete the programme will be recognised as a *UCL School for Sustainable Futures*, receiving a certificate, a logo and a letter to the headteacher. All participating teachers will receive a certificate and have an opportunity to join a network of Associate Teaching Fellows of UCL's Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education.

Why should my school get involved?

If you are interested in embedding climate change, nature and sustainability into your curriculum, the programme offers:

- Free support from a UCL partner throughout the year.
- Access to the experience and expertise of pre-pilot schools.
- Membership of a community of schools leading curriculum innovation.
- A full day of free training at UCL.
- The opportunity to join the network of Associate Teaching Fellows of UCL's Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education.
- Support to raise the profile of sustainability education within your school and engage senior leaders.

What are the commitments required?

Participating schools will:

- Attend a one-day in-person event at UCL on **24 September 2026**. The Project Lead should normally be the person to attend and may bring other colleagues if they wish. The day is provided at no cost but schools must fund travel and supply costs.
- Attend half-termly online catch-up meetings with their UCL partner and scheduled online meetings with other participating schools. These will always take place after school and will last between 45-60 minutes.
- Design and implement a curriculum project to finish by July 2027.
- Collect light-touch evidence of the impact of the project on young people (and possibly on teachers) in the form of short surveys/informal focus groups/student work.
- Write up a brief summary of the project which UCL can use to create a case study on its website.
- Attend a one-day celebratory event in July 2027 for the formal award of *Schools for Sustainable Futures* status. Venue to be confirmed.

How can I apply and what if the application is unsuccessful?

To apply, schools should complete the short application form which includes confirmation of headteacher support. We will hold an online drop-in session to answer any questions on **Wednesday 17 June 4-5pm**. You can register [here](#).

There are **limited places available for 2026–2027**. Applications will be assessed against the criteria below. If we receive more applications that meet the criteria than we have capacity for, we will select a balanced cohort in terms of phase, location and demographics. Schools that are not selected are welcome to reapply in future years. UCL is also planning to introduce a ‘self-accreditation’ route in due course, enabling schools to gain recognition for curriculum innovation projects developed outside the *Schools for Sustainable Futures* programme.

The selection criteria for applications are as follows. **Note that as this is a pilot, some flexibility will be applied.** Applicants are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the current *Teaching for Sustainable Futures* module offer (see www.climateeducation.org.uk), particularly for criterion f.

a. The project responds to the school’s context and needs.

How is it particularly suited to your school or local community?

b. The project embeds climate change, nature and/or sustainability in the curriculum in creative ways.

What aspects of climate change, nature and sustainability does the project address? Does it introduce something new or build on existing work (either is fine)? How will it be sustained beyond the first year?

c. The project benefits staff and students.

What are the benefits for staff, students and potentially the wider community? How do these align with UCL’s Outcomes for Young People? (*Projects can be small-scale; originality and feasibility are key.*)

d. The project is ambitious but realistic.

How many staff and students will be involved, and what is the expected time commitment? (*Projects may range from small-scale to whole-school. Ambition may relate to depth rather than scale, with potential for future expansion.*)

e. The Project Lead is well supported.

Who will be in the steering group and what are their roles? Could students or governors be involved? Has the Headteacher agreed to the school’s involvement?

f. There is a commitment to integrating *Teaching for Sustainable Futures* into the school’s professional development.

What approach could be most effective over a two-year period?

What might a year-long project look like?

Here are some examples of projects completed by the pilot schools this year.

St Patrick's Primary School in Liverpool is committed to connecting children to the natural world around them. The school's sustainability lead has worked with colleagues to build a strong sustainability focus into the school curriculum. Last year, the teachers at St Patrick's began by enhancing a local history enquiry, providing a stronger focus on the changing natural environment of the school's neighbourhood. This year they built on this work as part of the *Schools for Sustainable Futures* pre-pilot by developing an interdisciplinary enquiry combining Geography and Art to develop Year One children's thinking about the local area from the perspective of 'Bobby Blackbird'.

The Chase Secondary School in Malvern is committed to developing interdisciplinary approaches when teaching the ecological crisis. For their cross-over topic for the UCL *Schools for Sustainable Futures* pre-pilot, they spotted that their Year Eight class reader in English, following a climate migrant living in a world with water scarcity, is taught at a similar time to the water cycle in Science and Environmental Management in Geography. They subsequently collaborated on a sequence of starter tasks with the aim of strengthening climate related vocabulary and concepts for students across these subjects.

West Lodge Primary School in Harrow has been exploring composting food waste across the curriculum with Year Three pupils. They have developed two enquiry questions to guide their project: *How do we make compost?* and *Why do we make compost?* The project shows how small changes in thinking about everyday waste can lead to meaningful improvements in personal sustainability practices.

As a school community, **Woodford County High School in London** has been gradually developing sustainability linked activities, CPD and lessons over the last three years. This year they have taken part in the UCL *Schools for Sustainable Futures* pre-pilot and their project has involved colleagues from MFL, History and Science working collaboratively to introduce the theme of water and its importance in order to extend existing curriculum topics. This approach has stimulated great student discussions, helping them to make cross-curricular connections, encouraging systems thinking and developing solution-based learning.

In **Cragside Primary School in Northumberland**, Year Two pupils have completed a curriculum project exploring the biodiversity of their school grounds and identifying rewilding practices to enhance it. The lead teacher has created a 'Floor Book' to present the activities in an accessible and manageable way.