

CLIMATE CRISIS

YOUTH SURVEY



**Belfast Climate
Commission Youth
Working Group**
5th November 2021



Supported by
**Belfast
City Council**



1. INTRODUCTION

Belfast Climate Commission Youth Working Group have designed a youth led, action research project to explore young peoples' views and opinions across a range of issues associated with Climate Change. The aim of this project is to inform the planning of a locally based event scheduled for 5th November 2021, to coincide with COP26, which will be held in Glasgow (this is the United Nations Global summit known as the Conference of the Parties).

The following report presents the findings from a survey which been designed to capture the views and perspectives of young people (aged 13-24 years old) living in Northern Ireland, about climate change.

1.2 Background to project

The Belfast Climate Commission Youth Working Group was initially established through the Community Climate Action Working Group and was formally ratified by the Climate Commission in 2020. The group consists of representatives from the following organisations:

Belfast Youth Forum

Ulster Wildlife

National Museums NI

NISCN / XR

QUB Climate Action Group

Keep NI Beautiful

Belfast Hills Partnership

As part of its workplan the BCCYWG participated in several themed workshops in 2020 to explore the development of aims, objectives and a vision (it is important to note that Covid-19 and the subsequent health regulations had a significant impact on the group's ability to meet and develop the project). Following these sessions, the group agrees that its vision was 'a zero-carbon city by 2035' and that its mission was 'young activists for a green city'.

The group also produced four strategic aims:

- Increased awareness of climate challenges among the youth of Belfast
- Increased capacity of young people to slow climate change
- Supporting the work of the Belfast Climate Commission
- Supporting global efforts by youth to protect our planet

To support the delivery of these aims the group formulated a series of short and long-term activities which included the following:

1. Host a Youth Summit around COP 26
2. Design and produce a mural
3. Train Youth Climate Advocates
4. Devise a Green Innovation Bank
5. Establish a range of initiatives around 'zero waste shopping'

Given the timing, the group felt it appropriate to prioritise the hosting of a Youth Summit to coincide with the COP 26 in Glasgow in early November 2021. To support the summit the group felt it necessary to 'ask young people what they thought about climate change' and then use this information and evidence to structure the event itself.

1.3 Methodology

There were several stages to the project which have been outlined below:

- The group met in early 2021 to discuss the practicalities of hosting a Youth Summit and put in place a series of actions and an agreed timeline.
- Following this session members of the group met with an academic on two occasions in July and August 2021 to discuss the merits of conducting research into a range of issues relating to climate change. The academic discussed the various positives and limitations of focus groups and surveys, along with the processes required to analyse the data sets.
- A workshop was held between the group and the academic and this involved the participants working through potential survey questions and the drafting a questionnaire. The participants settled on five themes to be explored in the survey – demographics, knowledge and understanding of climate change, accessing information about climate change, personal participation in climate change related activities, and the future.
- A draft survey was then developed and shared with the group in September 2021 and following constructive feedback, changes were made to the survey and preparations were made for piloting it.
- The administration of the survey took place on the Your Say Platform from the 30th of September to the 13th of October 2021. The link was widely promoted through a range of social media forums and with existing networks established by the young people.
- When the survey closed there was a 'reflection on the findings' workshop. Members of the group and an academic worked through the main findings from the survey and developed a draft report. This session also involved the development of recommendations and a dissemination plan of the findings.
- A concluding session involving members of the group and the academic was held on the 28th of October 2021 to discuss the main policy recommendations and to finalise the structure of the Youth Summit.


1.4 Survey design and delivery

As previously noted the group worked closely with an academic to both design and administer an online survey. It was decided to use Your Say Platform and to promote the survey through a youth-led social media campaign. The group also agreed that the purpose of the survey (aimed at young people aged 13-24) was to 'explore young peoples' views and opinions about a range of issues associated with Climate Change, to help inform the planning of a series of locally based events scheduled for November 2022, to coincide with COP 26, which will be held in Glasgow (this is the United Nations Global summit known as the Conference of the Parties). The survey was officially launched on the 30th September 2021. The survey closed on the 13th October 2021.

The survey was designed around four agreed themes. These included:

- Knowledge and understanding of climate change
- Accessing information around climate change
- Personal participation in climate change related issues
- The future and the impact of climate change

Throughout this process the project team monitored the response rate and continued to promote the survey through social media and existing networks.



2. SURVEY FINDINGS

The following section of the report details the key findings to emerge from the survey, which was completed by 1200 young people aged between 13-24 years of age. The statistics are presented under five themed headings including demographics; Knowledge and understanding, accessing information, personal participation, and the future surrounding climate change.

2.1 Demographics

In total 1200 young people aged between 13 and 24 years participated in the survey (figure 1). Of that figure the largest age category was 13 (32%) and the smallest age group were those aged 23 and 24 (0.5% respectively).

Figure 1: Total age of participants

Age of participants	% of participants	Number of participants
13	32%	366
14	17%	201
15	13%	158
16	13%	159
17	15%	183
18	4%	53
19	2%	22
20	1%	15
21	1%	16
22	1%	12
23	.5%	7
24	.5%	8
TOTAL	100%	1200

In terms of gender, the initial analysis revealed that more females (55%) than males (37%) completed the survey (figure 2). With a further 3% of participants indicating that they preferred not to say.

Figure 2: Gender of the participants

Gender of participants	% of participants	Number of participants
Male	37%	439
Female	55%	659
Non binary	4%	46
Trans male	.5%	11
Trans female	-	2
Prefer not to say	3%	36
Other	.5%	7
TOTAL	100%	1200

The participants were also asked to indicate their community background, with 36% noting that they were a member of the Protestant community (figure 3). A further 33% indicated that they were a member of the Roman Catholic community.

Figure 3: Community background of the participants

Background	% of participants	Number of participants
Member of the Protestant community	36%	426
Member of the Roman Catholic community	33%	394
Member of neither the Protestant nor the Roman Catholic community	19%	232
Prefer not to say	12%	148
TOTAL	100%	1200

In relation to ethnic background, the largest number of participants (57%) stated that they were White Northern Irish while a further 27% indicated that they were White Irish, with a further 16% stating they were White British. (figure 4).

Figure 4: Ethnic background

Ethnic background	% of participants	Number of participants
White Northern Irish	57%	686
White Irish	27%	321
White British	16%	192
Asian or Asian British/Irish/Indian	4%	47
White other European	4%	43
Other	2%	23
Black or Black British/Irish/African	2%	15
Chinese	1%	8
Other Asian Background	1%	6
Irish Traveller	-	3

*Participants could tick more than one

The young people were then asked to provide some background about their status (figure 5). The results showed that the overwhelming majority of them were in education (98%) with the next largest group in part-time employment (14%). It appears that a large number of young people were in both employment and education.

Figure 5: Current status of participants

Current status	% of participants	Number of participants
In education	98%	1175
Part-time employment	14%	164
Full time employment	1%	14
Training	1%	15
Not in education; training or employment	-	3
Juvenile Justice Centre	-	4
In care or in care in the past	1%	9
Hospital	-	2
Other	1%	9

*Participants could tick more than one

Finally, the participants were provided with a question about their place of residence (figure 6), with the largest number of young people (42%) stating that they lived outside of Belfast. The smallest number of participants (7%) appeared to reside in East Belfast.

Figure 6: Location of participants

Place of residence	% of participants	Number of participants
North Belfast	12%	147
South Belfast	10%	115
East Belfast	7%	81
West Belfast	9%	106
Outside of Belfast	42%	509
Other	20%	242
TOTAL	100%	1200

2.1 Knowledge and understanding

The survey then began to explore with young people their knowledge and understanding of climate change. Firstly, all the participants were asked whether they had ever heard of climate change (figure 7) with the overwhelming majority (98%) indicating they had. Only 20 young people (2%) did not know or had never heard the term before.

Figure 7: Have you heard of climate change?

	% of participants	Number of participants
Yes	98%	1180
No	1%	10
Don't Know	1%	10
TOTAL	100%	1200



Of those young people that had heard of climate change just over a quarter (28%) were very concerned about it (figure 8). Further analysis revealed that 24% were extremely concerned and a further 14% a little concerned. Only 8% of young people were not very concerned.

Figure 8: Level of concern about climate change

	% of participants	Number of participants
Not very concerned	8%	94
A little concerned	14%	169
Somewhat concerned	26%	301
Very concerned	28%	337
Extremely concerned	24%	279
TOTAL	100%	1180

Following on from this the young people were asked if they had personally been affected by climate change (figure 9). The results revealed that just under one third (30%) stated that they had been affected, with a further 42% indicating that they had not.

Figure 9: Do you feel that you have personally been affected by climate change

	% of participants	Number of participants
Yes	30%	359
No	42%	494
Don't Know	28%	327
TOTAL	100%	1180

To explore this topic in more detail the survey provided young people with an opportunity to indicate how climate change had affected them (figure 10). It became apparent that 41% of young people had experienced 'anxiousness' because of thinking about climate change, while 13% suggested that they had become distracted from other things. It is also important to note that 54% stated that none of the options available to them were relevant.

Figure 10: How have you been personally affected by climate change

	% of participants	Number of participants
Worrying has kept me awake	11%	133
Worrying has affected my appetite	3%	37
I am distracted from other things	13%	151
I have had bad dreams	5%	61
It makes me anxious	41%	485
None of the above	54%	633

* Participants could tick more than one

As the survey progressed the young people were asked to think about a range of climate change related issues and then rank in order which ones, they felt were most important to them (figure 11). The results showed that global warming was of most importance, while traffic congestion was of least significance. Other issues which ranked particularly high were the extinction of animal species and sea/river pollution.

Figure 11: Rank the following in terms of importance

Issues	Average rank
Global warming	3.23
Extinction of animal species	3.81
Sea/river pollution	4.40
Fossil fuels	4.60
Reducing Waste	5.28
Flooding	5.45
Overpopulation	5.80
Litter	5.81
Traffic congestion	6.63

2.2. Accessing information

The next stage of the questionnaire aimed to examine the respondents' views on accessing information pertaining to climate change alongside the types of content which interested young people. Initially, the survey focused on how often the respondents had heard (figure 12) and talked (figure 13) about climate change in the last fortnight. It was interesting to note that 45% of young people said that they had heard the term climate change at least once every week, while a further 22% had heard the term at least twice every week. However, it is also worth noting that just over one fifth of respondents (22%) had never heard the term.

Figure 12: In the last two weeks have you heard the term climate change

	% of participants	Number of participants
Every day	11%	134
At least once every week	45%	528
At least twice every week	22%	260
Never	22%	258
TOTAL	100%	1180

With regards talking about climate change, the young people noted that 40% of them had discussed it at least once every week, with a further 13% stating that they had discussed it at least twice every week. However, a large number (41%) indicated that they had never discussed it.

Figure 13: In the last two weeks have you talked about climate change

	% of participants	Number of participants
Every day	4%	45
At least once every week	40%	476
At least twice every week	13%	154
Never	41%	478
Other	2%	27
TOTAL	100%	1180



The next question focused on how young people received (or did not receive) information about climate change (figure 14). They were provided with a comprehensive list of sources and asked to comment on the level of information about climate change they received from each one. The analysis revealed that the most

popular source of receiving information was through social media (89%) followed by through a school/college (83%) and then TV/Films (67%). In terms of sources that did not provide information, the most popular response was work (89%), followed by religious settings (82%) and youth groups (72%).

Figure 14: How do you receive your information about climate change

	Lots of information	Little bit of information	No information
Family	9%	53%	38%
Social media	51%	38%	11%
You Tube	22%	43%	35%
School/College	33%	50%	17%
Work	2%	9%	89%
Local council	5%	31%	64%
Youth groups	7%	21%	72%
Friends	11%	44%	45%
TV/Films	16%	51%	33%
Books/Newspapers	25%	42%	33%
Religious settings	2%	16%	82%

This section of the questionnaire concluded with a question relating to levels of trust in relation to different potential providers of information (figure 15). The analysis revealed that overwhelming majority of young people trust information either a lot or a little from scientists (95%). This was followed by climate change groups (83%) and school/college teachers (83%).

It was interesting to note that just over one third of young people (35%) would trust local politicians either a lot or a little. In relation to sources which respondents would not trust, the results suggest that 39% of young people would not trust local politicians very much or at all. This was followed by energy suppliers (36%) and the media (34%).

Figure 15: How much do you trust information about climate change from the following people and institutions

	A lot	A little	Number of participants	Not very much	Not at all
Family member	38%	33%	16%	9%	4%
Friend	20%	48%	18%	10%	4%
Local politicians	10%	25%	26%	23%	16%
School/college teacher	44%	39%	9%	8%	-
Scientist	83%	12%	5%	-	-
Climate change group	60%	23%	9%	3%	5%
Energy supplier	10%	24%	30%	21%	15%
The media	7%	36%	23%	23%	11%
NI government	15%	32%	26%	15%	12%

2.3. Participation

In terms of young people's levels of participation in climate change related activities the survey first posed a question around whether they thought there was anything that could be done to reduce the negative effects of climate change (figure 16). The results found that the majority of young people (88%) thought something could be done, compared with 3% who were less optimistic.

Figure 16: Do you think anything can be done to reduce the negative effects of climate change

	% of participants	Number of participants
Yes	88%	1036
No	3%	41
Don't know	9%	103
TOTAL	100%	1180

In relation to identifying who was responsible for reducing these negative effects (figure 17), the most popular response noted by the young people was the UK government (47%) followed by individuals themselves (21%). The least popular response was attributed to the local council (1%) followed by climate change groups (4%).

Figure 17: Who do you think should have ultimate responsibility to reduce the negative effects of climate change

	% of participants	Number of participants
The UK government	47%	560
The NI government	8%	93
The district council	1%	12
Businesses	8%	95
Climate change groups	4%	49
Individuals	21%	243
Don't know	11%	128
TOTAL	100%	1180

To gain a better understanding around the levels of respondents' involvement in climate change activities the questionnaire posed a series of questions on individual participation. It became apparent that in the last six months 50% of young people had acted out of concern for climate change (figure 18), while a further 32% had not.

Figure 18: In the last six months have you taken any action out of concern for climate change

	% of participants	Number of participants
Yes	50%	584
No	32%	381
Don't know	18%	215
TOTAL	100%	1180



For those young people that had indicated that they had 'taken action' in the last six months there was an opportunity to explore in more detail what this entailed (figure 19). The results indicated that the most frequent activity conducted by the young people was reducing plastic waste (85%), closely followed by walking (78%) and using public transport (63%). The least popular activity undertaken by the young people was organising a petition or protest (4%).

Figure 19: What action have you taken?

	% of participants	Number of participants
Reducing plastic waste	85%	496
Changed my eating habits	35%	202
Recycled clothes and furniture	59%	345
Used public transport	63%	365
Cycled	28%	166
Walked	78%	453
Raised issue of climate change with family	42%	248
Raised issue of climate change with friends	45%	264
Organised a petition or protest	4%	25
Actively involved with a climate change group	14%	79

* Participants could tick more than one

These respondents were also asked to explain why they acted in the last six months in terms of climate change (figure 20). It became apparent that reading about general issues of climate change online (66%) was the most frequent

response, followed by the media reporting of climate change (57%). The three least popular motivations for 'taking action' were an awareness campaign (23%), along with friends (26%) and family (27%) discussing the issue.

Figure 20: What made you want to respond to the issue of climate change?

	% of participants	Number of participants
Media reporting of climate change	57%	332
Issue was raised in my school/work	39%	225
Reported deaths and injuries because of climate change	41%	238
Reading about general issues of climate change online	66%	384
Family discussions on the issue	27%	158
Friends' discussions on the issue	26%	150
An awareness campaign	23%	136
Inspired by activists, celebrities and others	41%	238

* Participants could tick more than one



All the respondents were then asked to consider what they thought were the main barriers to 'taking action' out of concern for climate change (figure 21). The three most popular responses were young people thinking they could not make a difference on their own (53%), people in positions of power will not listen to young people's views and opinions (43%),

and the fact that they had other commitments (42%). It was also interesting to note that a third of respondents (33%) suggested that a barrier to getting involved was that activists are often portrayed negatively. Furthermore, it is too late to make a difference was only seen as a barrier to 6% of respondents.

Figure 21: What do you think are the main barriers facing you when it comes to 'taking action' out of concern for climate change?

	% of participants	Number of participants
I don't know what climate change is	12%	149
My friends are not interested	23%	274
My family are not interested	23%	273
I don't know how to get information	17%	202
It is not discussed within my school/ workplace	24%	284
Activists are often portrayed negatively	33%	397
I cannot make a difference on my own	53%	636
There are no protests or events in my area	40%	478
I have other commitments	42%	505
People in positions of power will not listen to my views and opinions	43%	519
It is too late to make a difference	6%	68

* Participants could tick more than one

In response to the barriers the young people were also asked about what they thought would increase their confidence and capacity to engage with the issue of climate change (figure 22). The two most popular responses were If others around me (people in power/elected representatives), were to make more effort

to protect the environment (53%) and general information on how I can affect change (53%). The two least popular responses were around opportunities to meet people who are involved in activism (34%) and those simply that did not want to engage with the issue (13%).

Figure 22: What would increase your confidence and capacity to engage with the issue of climate change?

	% of participants	Number of participants
General information on how I can affect change	53%	630
General information about Climate Change and its impact	37%	438
Opportunities to meet people who are involved in activism	34%	402
Opportunities to tell my views and opinions to people in power	38%	456
Opportunities to talk and learn about Climate change in school/college	39%	463
If others around me (friends/parents/parental figures), were to make more effort to protect the environment	41%	497
If others around me (people in power/elected representatives), were to make more effort to protect the environment	53%	635
I don't want to engage with the issue	13%	150

* Participants could tick more than one

The respondents were also asked to consider what topics in relation to climate change they might want to learn more about (figure 23). The largest number of young people (18%) indicated sustainable

energy, followed by recycling (12%), reducing household waste (9%), the impact of fossil fuels (9%) and plastics and pollution (9%).

Figure 23: What topics would you like to learn more about?

	% of participants	Number of participants
Reducing household waste	9%	109
Recycling	12%	145
Sustainable buildings	5%	62
Sustainable energy	18%	218
Sustainable food production	5%	61
Engaging with policy makers/politicians	6%	70
The role of industry	4%	52
The impact of fossil fuels	9%	100
Plastics and pollution	9%	110
Getting involved in climate change activism	8%	90
Efforts at the local level to protect the environment	6%	73
I don't want to learn about it	8%	94
Other	1%	16
TOTAL	100%	1200



2. SURVEY FINDINGS

2.4. Moving forward

The final section of the questionnaire focused on the future asking respondents to reflect on a series of statements (figure 24) and then asking them to indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of them. It was interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of young people (82%) strongly disagreed with the statement that climate change is not real. Furthermore, 67% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that it was too late to do anything about climate change. Further analysis revealed that 74% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that there needs to be a focus on greener employment opportunities; and 81% either agreed or strongly agreed with the view that there should be incentives to encourage the public to become more aware of climate change. Finally, 81% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that young people must ensure that their voice is heard, and 87% either agreed or strongly agreed that we all have a role to play in protecting the environment.

Figure 24: Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree/disagree with each one

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Climate Change is not real	3%	2%	6%	7%	82%
The evidence for climate change is unreliable	3%	6%	17%	24%	50%
The media hype up concerns about climate change	10%	20%	25%	18%	27%
Climate change is inevitable because of people's lifestyles	15%	38%	24%	15%	8%
It is too late to do anything about climate change	3%	12%	18%	36%	31%
Individuals cannot make a difference	7%	16%	17%	28%	32%
There are more important things than climate change	8%	14%	28%	28%	22%
There needs to be a focus on greener employment opportunities	41%	33%	21%	3%	2%
There should be incentives to encourage the public to become more aware of Climate Change	53%	28%	14%	2%	3%
Young people must ensure that their voice is heard	56%	25%	12%	4%	3%
I feel ignored by adults and people in power	31%	24%	29%	8%	8%
We all have a role to play in protecting the environment	66%	21%	10%	2%	1%

For those young people that had indicated that they had 'taken action' in the last six months there was an opportunity to explore in more detail what this entailed (figure 19). The results indicated that the most frequent activity conducted by the young people was reducing plastic waste (85%), closely followed by walking (78%) and using public transport (63%). The least popular activity undertaken by the young people was organising a petition or protest (4%).

Figure 25: Do you know there are two Climate Change Bills currently being processed in the Northern Ireland Assembly?

	% of participants	Number of participants
Yes	17%	207
No	83%	993
TOTAL	100%	1200

In terms of the COP26, the results showed that just over three quarters of respondents (76%) were unaware of the conference, with 24% stating that they knew about it.

Figure 26: The Conference of Parties (COP26) will be held in Glasgow in November 2021. Do you know what this is about?

	% of participants	Number of participants
Yes	24%	291
No	76%	909
TOTAL	100%	1200

The final question in the survey was open-ended and provided respondents with the opportunity to describe how they felt when they thought about their own futures and the environment (figure 27). It was interesting to note that all the respondents left a comment, some more extensive than others. However, the overall sentiment from the young people was one of negativity and fear for the future, with the following words capturing the views of the respondents:

- Concern
- Sadness
- Anxious
- Guilty
- Frightened
- Pessimistic
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Angry
- Frustrated

The following quotes reflect the overall views and opinions from the young people and provide a sense of how they view the future in relation to climate change.

Figure 27: Can you tell us how you feel when you think about your future and the environment?

THERE ARE NO SECOND CHANCES WHEN IT COME TO OUR PLANET, WE NEED TO MAKE CHANGES NOW.

BLEAK AND NOT HOPEFUL BECAUSE NOTHING HAS REALLY CHANGED TO PREVENT MORE OF OUR ECO SYSTEMS BEING DESTROYED.

I AM SAD THAT BY THE TIME I'M OLD ENOUGH TO WORK AND LIVE INDEPENDENTLY, THE RAMIFICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE WILL HAVE CAUGHT UP WITH HUMANITY IN A MAJOR WAY.

THE ONLY WAY WE CAN SOLVE CLIMATE CHANGE IS TOGETHERNESS. WE NEED TO MAKE SACRIFICES IN LUXURY ITEMS AND PRODUCTS TO BE ABLE TO LIVE ON THIS BEAUTIFUL PLANET. DON'T FOCUS ON SOME PLANET LIKE MARS WE SHOULD BE TRYING TO MAKE EARTH BETTER NOT WORSE.

I WANT TO BE ABLE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN ENSURING THE ENVIRONMENT IS OK FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

I FEEL LIKE NO ONE CARES AND IT MAKES ME ANNOYED BECAUSE WE ALL WILL PAY THE CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE. I FEEL THAT THE ENVIRONMENT WILL CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE, AND MANY SPECIES WILL BE ENDANGERED OR GO EXTINCT.

SCARED BECAUSE GOVERNMENTS AND THOSE IN POSITIONS OF POWER DO NOT CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE. CLIMATE CHANGE IS LINING THE POCKETS OF MANY INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE AND SO THERE IS UNLIKELY TO BE ANY REAL CHANGE WITHOUT HUGE MOVEMENTS.

3. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section is an opportunity to reflect on the results and consider particular areas of importance and potential recommendations. The survey has allowed for the opinions and experiences of young people from across Northern Ireland to be collated and analysed so a picture can emerge around their views on a range of issues that relate to climate change.

3.1 Knowledge and understanding

The findings have revealed that the vast majority of young people had some degree of knowledge and understanding of climate change, with a strong emphasis on the dire consequences of global warming. Furthermore, respondents indicated that they had negatively been affected by thinking about climate change. These results are also reflected in other surveys, with Bath University¹ recently publishing the results from an international survey of 10,000 young people (16-25 years of age) which revealed that 60% were either worried or very worried about climate change. The authors noted that climate change was causing distress, anger and other negative

emotions in children and young people and that 'eco-anxiety' was impacting on their daily lives. It was also concluded that 75% of young people think the future is frightening.

In terms of this survey the results revealed that:

- 98% of young people have heard of climate change with 28% suggesting that they were very concerned about it and a further 24% extremely concerned about it.
- 30% of young people indicated that they had been affected by climate change with 42% stating that they had not.
- Of those that had been affected, 41% experienced 'anxiousness' while 13% suggested that they had become distracted from other things.
- According to the young people global warming was of most importance, while traffic congestion was of least significance. Other issues which ranked particularly high were the extinction of animal species and sea/river pollution.

3.2. Accessing information

In terms of accessing information about climate change the results found that a large number of young people have both heard and discussed the topic of climate change recently. It also became apparent that young people primarily engage on the topic through social media and have a high level of trust in scientists talking about it, especially when compared to local politicians. More specifically:

- 45% of young people said that they had heard the term climate change at least once every week, while a further 22% had heard the term at least twice every week. However, it is also worth noting that just over one fifth of respondents (22%) had never heard the term in the last two weeks.
- 40% of them had discussed climate change at least once every week, with a further 13% stating that they had discussed it at least twice every week. However, a large number (41%) indicated that they had never discussed it.
- 89% of young people receive their information about climate change through social media with 83% also receiving it through a school/college.
- 72% of young people received no information about climate change through a youth group.
- 95% of young people trust information about climate change either a lot or a little from scientists. While 83% trust information about climate change either a lot or a little from a school/college teacher.
- 35% trust local politicians either a lot or a little with information about climate change.

1. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/government-inaction-on-climate-change-linked-to-psychological-distress-in-young-people-new-study/>

3.3. Personal participation

The results overwhelming show that young people think something can be done to address the negative impact of climate change. Interestingly, they believe that the UK government has a significant responsibility to support this work. The barriers to participation have been drawn out in the findings and reveal that a sense of isolation and unimportance tend to explain why more people are not acting in response to climate change. More specifically:

- 88% of young people thought something could be done to reduce the negative effects of climate change, compared with 3% who were less optimistic.
- 47% of respondents identified the UK government as having ultimate responsibility to reduce the negative effects of climate change. 8% felt it was the responsibility of the NI government.
- 50% of young people had acted out of concern for climate change. Of those young people 85% had reduced their plastic waste, 78% walked and 63% used public transport. Reading about

general issues of climate change online had been the most significant influence on these young people.

- 53% of young people stated that 'people thinking they could not make a difference on their own was the greatest barrier to personally not acting in response to climate change'. A further 43% indicated that it was 'people in positions of power not listening to young people's views and opinions'.
- 53% of young people thought that 'if others around me (people in power/ elected representatives), were to make more effort to protect the environment' then it would increase their confidence and capacity to engage with the issue of climate change.
- 18% of young people wanted to know more about sustainable energy.

3.4. The future

The young people acknowledged the dangers and risks associated with climate change but were also of the view that 'things' could be put in place to reduce the negative impacts. However, it was also evident that many young people feel disempowered in any decision-making processes, and that adults and/or policy makers were unlikely to listen or shape their approaches to climate change based on the thoughts of young people. Similar findings have been reported in other surveys, with Amnesty² reporting that 41% of over 10,000 young people from across six continents thought that climate change was the most important issue facing the world with 54% of respondents also suggesting that governments should take responsibility for protecting the environment. Furthermore, a survey by Aviva in Ireland³, found that since the outbreak of the pandemic the public have become more aware of the impact of climate change on the environment. It also reported that 71% of respondents thought that the government needs to introduce regulatory changes to force better behaviours in terms of environmental impact.

In terms of this survey the results revealed that:

- 82% of young people strongly disagreed with the statement that climate change is not real.
- 67% of respondent either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that it was too late to do anything about climate change.
- 74% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that there needs to be a focus on greener employment opportunities.
- 87% either agreed or strongly agreed that we all have a role to play in protecting the environment.
- 55% of young people either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'I feel ignored by adults and people in power'.
- 83% of young people had no knowledge about the two climate change bills currently being processed in the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 76% of young people were unaware of the forthcoming COP26.

1. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/12/climate-change-ranks-highest-as-vital-issue-of-our-time/>

2. <https://www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2021/07/More-than-3-in-4-people-in-Ireland-concerned-about-the-impact-of-climate-change/>

3.5. Observations and actions

In a response to the survey findings the Belfast Climate Commission Youth Working Group developed a series of actions in the hope that they will raise knowledge and awareness of climate change and support those already engaged on the issues. It is also hoped that further discussions and debates will support the group deliver on its own action plan:

- a. The findings from the survey repeatedly reinforce the view that climate change is of significant interest to young people and that they are fearful for the future. In light of the importance of the issue it may be appropriate to consider the creation of an independent Youth Climate Commissioner who is responsible for advocating on young people's concerns and facilitating engagement across stakeholders. Alongside a commissioner there is also scope to develop a training programme for young people so they can become peer climate educators and support future engagement between young people and those tasked with implementing relevant policy.
- b. The findings suggest that young people trust scientists in terms of accessing information about climate change. However, it appears that they have less confidence in politicians. Therefore, it may be appropriate for elected representatives to use multiple platforms with 'experts' in the field of climate change to support the delivery of key messages and policy launches.
- c. According to the responses from the survey the young people trust schools and colleges as places to receive information about climate change. Therefore, it is important that educational settings and the staff have the tools, resources, and expertise to engage with young people on issues pertaining to climate change. There should also be an emphasis on teacher training and continued professional development on issues such as Carbon Literacy and the Eco-Schools Programme.
- d. The findings overwhelmingly show that young people access their information relating to climate change through online platforms. However, only a very small number were aware of the two climate change bills currently going through the Assembly. There may be an opportunity for our political institutions to engage with young people more, to better inform their own methods, style and tone surrounding their communications on issues relating to climate change. There is a need to simplify the language and terminology associated with climate change and ensure young people can both access and interpret the necessary information so they can contribute to the discussions.
- e. The analysis of the survey revealed that young people support the development of greener employment opportunities. There is an appetite for more information regarding this topic and this could be used as a vehicle for politicians, policy makers and young people to constructively engage on producing tangible outputs which look to address the negative impacts of climate change.



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