

CLIMATE VOICES

# YOUTH CLIMATE ACTION RESEARCH REPORT 2021



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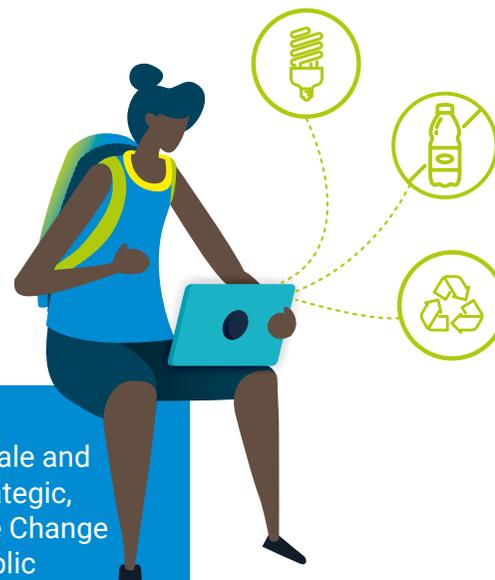
**InterClimate  
Network**

# What's it all about?

Action on climate change is now needed on an unprecedented scale and rate if we are to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050. Scientific, strategic, and regulatory solutions provide a critical part, but the UK Climate Change Committee highlights that the 'big cross-cutting challenges of public engagement, fair funding and local delivery' must also be tackled. Whichever new technologies we use or policies we deploy, another ingredient is therefore essential: widespread acceptance that we all need to change what we do and how we do it.

Today's secondary school students face adult lives which will be far more impacted by climate change than those of their parents and the current generation of political and industrial leaders. They both need, and want, to have meaningful participation in the major transition taking place across our society. To help understand how to best enable 11 to 18 year old students across the UK to engage with change processes, and inspire others to undertake climate action, we first set out to ask for their views, behaviours, and motivations around the climate crisis.

The resulting student-led Climate Action Survey has seen some 3,800 young people respond from six secondary schools between 2020 and 2021. The survey's high return rate provides a depth of understanding of young people's climate perspectives, and notably it offers insights into their views about how they can make a difference in their schools. This report summarises the findings and implications from this research. ICN want to share the findings to be of use to the many others who are trying to reduce emissions and mobilise greater climate action among young people.



## Let us know...

### How this report supports your work

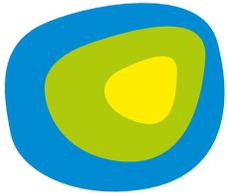
ICN would love to hear your thoughts and responses to this report, and how you are making use of what we have learned so far. Please contact us at [info@interclimate.org](mailto:info@interclimate.org) or tweet us [@ClimateVoicesUK](https://twitter.com/ClimateVoicesUK).

### How you could support ICN to reach new levels

ICN wants to extend the follow-up work with schools who have run the Climate Action Survey, supporting them to make further use of the insights to tailor their climate action interventions. We also plan to expand the reach of our work to bring the survey to more schools and their students. A third potential growth area, and one that has already been suggested by schools, is to develop an additional survey that students could run in their community to support wider climate action.

**If you are a business or funder** and are interested in learning about how you could support us, please get in touch: [info@interclimate.org](mailto:info@interclimate.org)

**If you are a school** and would like to run the Climate Action Survey, or participate in our other activities, please get in touch: [schools@interclimate.org](mailto:schools@interclimate.org)



## About InterClimate Network

InterClimate Network (ICN) is a registered charity with a mission to inspire young people in the UK to become leaders and advocates for action on climate change. We do this by working collaboratively to deliver programmes that engage young people (primarily aged 11 to 18) with the complexities of climate change, inspire and encourage their climate action, and promote their voices in their own sustainable future.

Our current work is engaging with thousands of young people and includes: Climate Conferences using UN-style negotiations; partnership in an International Climate Action Network to give teachers the skills, confidence and framework to enable pupils to become climate conscious citizens; and Secretariat of the Youth Action Against Climate Change APPG (All-Party Parliamentary Group), supporting parliamentarians in creating a platform to elevate youth voices on climate change in Westminster.

### About the authors

The Climate Action Survey initiative has been led by Cecily Etherington working with Michila Critchley, Rachel Shepherd and Richard Usher (ICN Associates), and with the expert input of ICN Trustees. This report is written by Cecily Etherington with Michila Critchley.

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## Key findings from our Climate Action Survey

To help enable 11 to 18 year olds to take climate action, InterClimate Network first set out to ask for their views, behaviours, and motivations around the climate crisis. The resulting Climate Action Survey has seen some 3,800 young people respond between 2020 and 2021.

**More than 8 in 10 young people are concerned about climate change.**



8/10 think climate change is already having a negative effect on people's lives around the world.



3/4 believe climate change will affect their life in the future.

**1 in 2 young people are already choosing to act on climate change.**



Many strongly advocate that we all have a part to play, and joined-up actions are needed.



97% of those already acting are doing so in their homes.



Only 2/10 are acting on climate change in their school and 1/10 in their community.

### What would further motivate young people to act in school?



Install more equipment that make it easier to undertake action.



Track results and showcase the positive impact of our actions.



Greater engagement with students so they understand the rules and how they will help.



Linking climate action to other campaigns that make life better.

### What is stopping climate action by young people?

**1** Young people expressed strong views that governments, businesses, and other adults are not doing enough.

**2** 1/2 are unsure of how they can personally help.

**3** 8/10 feel insufficient time is provided in school for positive climate action.

**4** Many feel individual actions have little impact without wider structural change, and that their views don't carry much weight in society, school or even their social group.

**Young people feel that, as they are the ones who are going to have to live with the reality of climate change, their views should have more of an influence.**

### Who inspires young people to take climate action?



Schools provide the most inspiration on climate action, with teachers cited as role models.



9/10 of those acting in the home are supported to do so by their families.



1/4 said that Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough had influenced their thinking on climate change.

### Four enablers for climate action



Opportunity



Community



Knowledge



Being Positive

**Use our Climate Activation Framework to help inspire and enable more young people to take positive action for the climate**



## INTRODUCTION TO THE CLIMATE ACTION SURVEY

### Background

Through InterClimate Network's long-standing work with secondary school eco-groups we know many students and teachers have strong ambitions and creative ideas to reduce their school communities emissions. As is the case with wider society, achieving such carbon reduction plans requires a change in behaviours across the whole school community. Eco groups told us this wider engagement was something they were struggling with, even for straightforward behaviours such as recycling, "People always joke about it and think that it's "cool" to litter or "they just think the janitor is lazy."

### A behaviour-change approach

In response, between 2020 and 2021, ICN developed an innovative Climate Action Survey toolkit for use in secondary schools. **This toolkit, made up of a set of resources and bespoke analysis, aims to provide a deeper understanding of young people's beliefs and motivations regarding the climate crisis, which eco-groups and teachers can use to inform their school's climate initiatives.** At its core is an established behaviour-change premise that in order to bring about long-lasting change, it is important to understand:

- Who you are talking with;
- Why some people haven't already made changes;
- What barriers are preventing them from adopting any new behaviour, and;
- What are relevant motivations for more action.

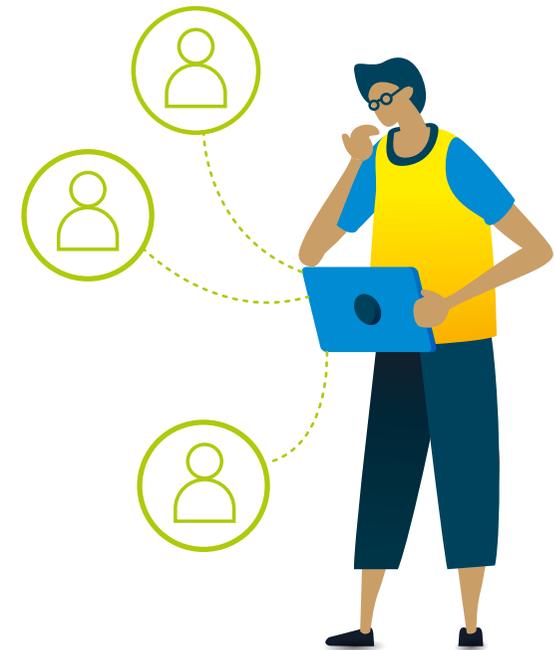
### How the Climate Action Survey works

**A core team of students lead the initiative in their school and use our step-by-step resource to roll out the survey:** This student-led approach not only gives ownership to the students, but by coming from the students themselves helps ensure a broader response rate. By asking as many students as possible in their school to complete the survey the intention is for everyone to 'have a say'. ICN analyses the data and provides the school with an insights report.

**For ICN, it is critical that understanding should inform action:** A toolkit of resources is now being built which supports student groups and teachers to use their survey insights to tailor their climate interventions to really engage their peers, whatever their viewpoints.

**Our data can be brought together from individual schools and analysed on a regional and national level,** as shown throughout this report. We will always feed these findings back to those who completed the survey, helping to ensure young people know that their voices are being listened to.

**These approaches are rooted in empowerment and student agency:** Simply by completing the survey, students realise that their views matter. By running the survey in school, those already active become leaders, helping those not active to become involved. There are intended longer-term benefits in providing young people with the skills and reinforcement they need to continue to have a say and lead positive action into the future.



## Student and other expert input

From the beginning, we partnered with the course leader and **sociology students at the University of Gloucestershire** through their Applied Sociology module which supported students to make use of their research skills on a project with real-world impacts. Their resulting literature reviews informed the five themes on which the survey was built (see Section A) and ICN also worked interactively with the students to design the survey questions. The Gloucestershire students subsequent analysis of data and wider research has supported our ongoing analysis and their **in-depth contributions can be found within the 'spotlighting views' boxes throughout this report.**

**School students from nine schools from different areas across the UK responded to our call during lockdown and gave their time to help shape the development and final design of the survey.** ICN has gone on to provide opportunities for student feedback at each stage of development of the Climate Action Survey toolkit.

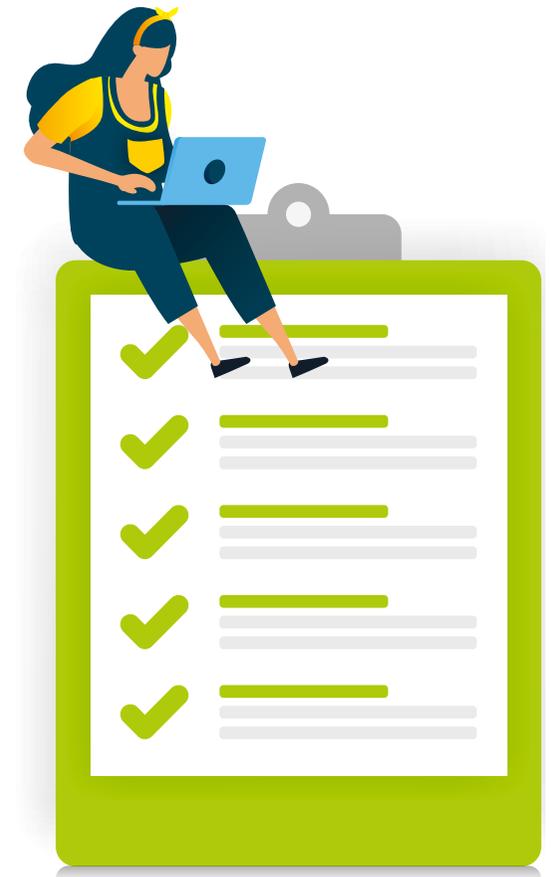
These are complex issues, and the Climate Action Survey has produced detailed results. We are indebted to the research firms **GlobeScan** and **Humankind Research** for the expertise and contextual input they provided so generously.

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### Thanks to...

Students and teachers from: Ashton Park School, Balcarras Academy, Cleeve School, Chosen Hill School, Hanley Castle Sixth Form, Isleworth and Syon School for Boys, Gumley House School FCJ, Lyndon School, Pate's Grammar School, Reading Girls' School, Reading School, Sir Thomas Rich's School, St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple School.

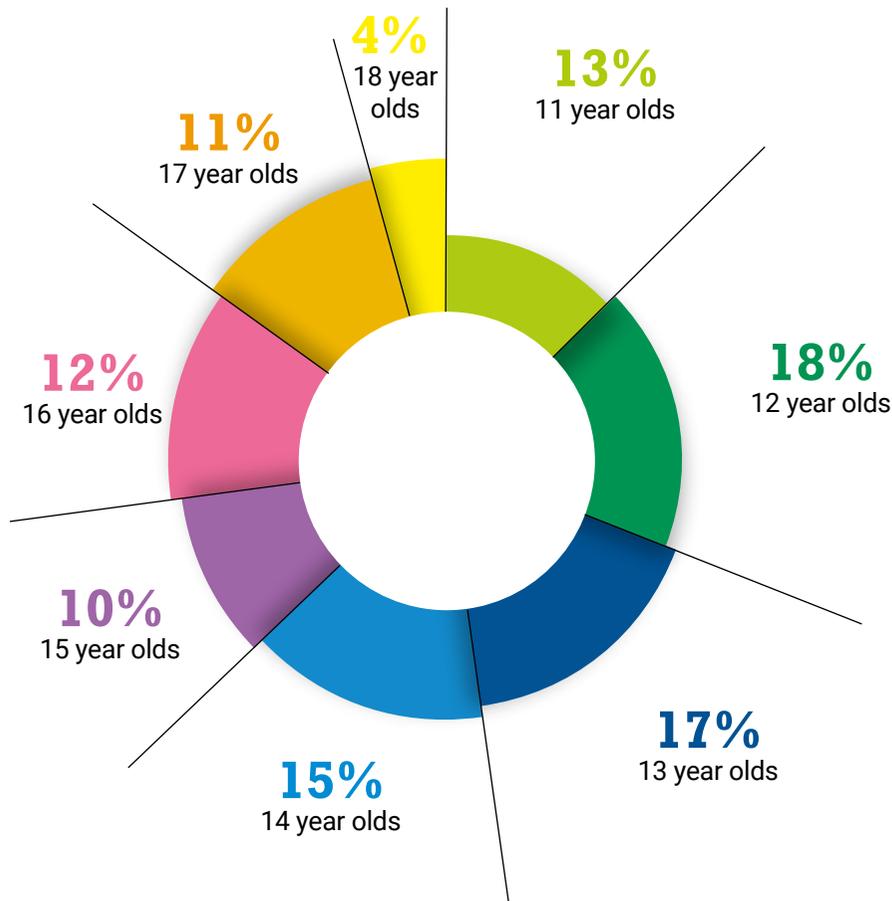
Thanks to undergraduate Sociology students, University of Gloucestershire, and their tutor, Dr Hazel Roberts: Emily Ackerman, Sarah Astbury, Izzy Clarke, Amy Gass, Joe Mitchell, Ronald Murray, Meg Price, Keri Simmonds, Molly Thomas-Chivers and Anabel Voysey.



## Who participated?

More than 3,800 students aged 11 to 18 years responded to the Climate Action Survey. ICN is grateful to all the lead student groups and their teachers, in the six schools from diverse catchment areas, who implemented the survey during an extremely difficult time, with many delivering the project during lockdown. The high response rate by each school is a testament both to their creative communication skills and their commitment to acting on the climate crisis even in the midst of the COVID pandemic.

### Age breakdown



### Gender breakdown



44%  
Female



53%  
Male



2%  
Non-binary



1%  
Prefer not to say

### Ethnicity breakdown

- 75%** White - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Any other White background
- 6%** Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background
- 11%** Asian / Asian British - Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese
- 4%** Any other Asian background - Black / African / Caribbean / Black British African Caribbean, Any other Black / African / Caribbean background
- 1%** Other ethnic group - Arab, Any other ethnic group
- 3%** Prefer not to say

## YOUTH VIEWS, BEHAVIOURS, AND MOTIVATIONS AROUND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

ICN's Climate Action Survey was constructed around five key themes identified in a literature review conducted by our partners on the University of Gloucestershire's Applied Sociology module ('Engagement with climate change by young people: A Literature Review'). The online survey uses a series of questions to explore and build on each theme so that the resulting data provides in-depth and unique perceptions of UK youth on: youth action; climate awareness; trusted sources; power to effect change; and climate action in school. This section sets out the five themes and students' responses (provided between December 2020 and October 2021) to the questions under each heading.



# Youth action

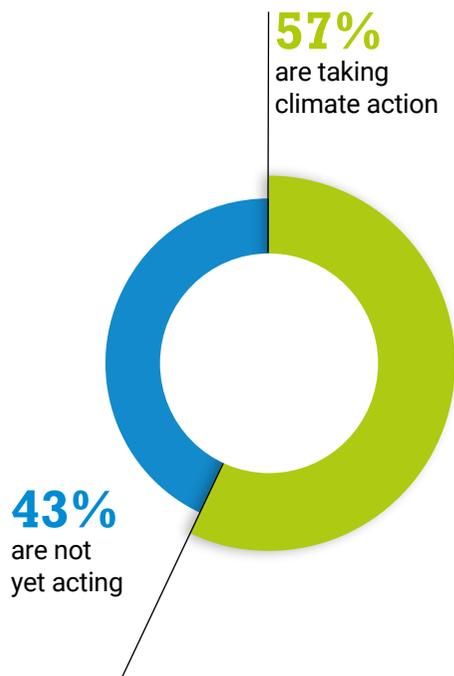
**Over half of all respondents are already taking some climate action.** Of the young people who are acting, almost all are doing so in their home. These are well established routines supported by their family. However, action in the home doesn't always translate to action elsewhere, with only a third saying they are acting on climate change in school. Action that does take place outside the home has started far more recently and is predominantly carried out with the support of others.



## Are young people acting on climate change?

## Of the 57% of young people who are already taking climate action what are they doing?

Please see Appendix 1 to find out who young people are taking action with and what motivates them.



**97%**  
Supporting action at home

**50%**  
Changing their diet to make it more environmentally friendly

**27%**  
Climate strikes/campaigning

**72%**  
Thinking about the effect of what they buy and use on the environment

**36%**  
Supporting action at school

**23%**  
Supporting action in the community

## What do the 43% who are not yet acting say is preventing them?

**32%** feel powerless to make a difference

**31%** don't feel individual actions will make a difference

**27%** thinks the responsibility to take action lies with governments and big corporations, not individuals

**19%** don't believe in climate change\*

**19%** would like to do more but are unsure of what to do

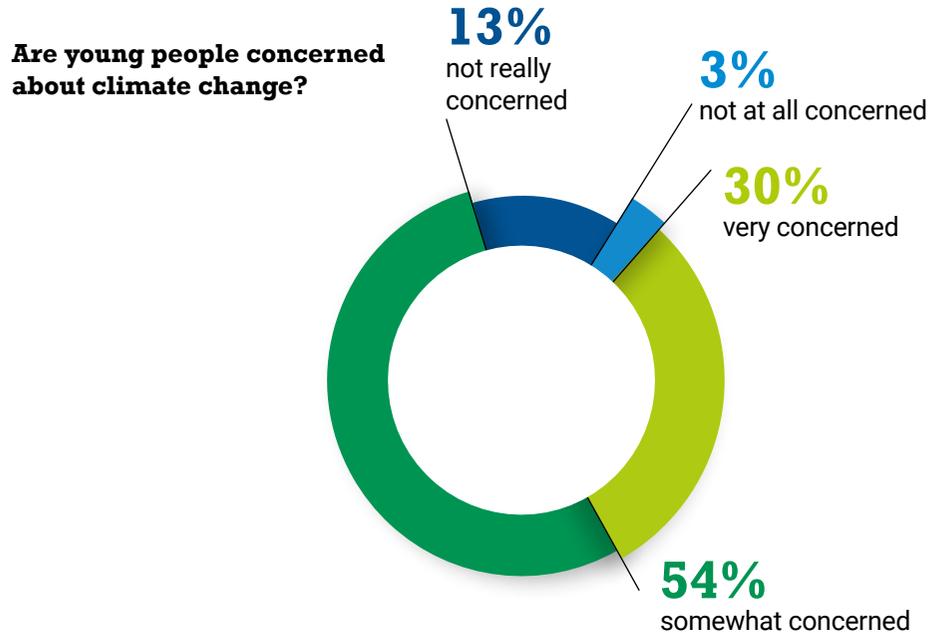
**9%** said 'Other'

**6%** would like to do more but haven't gotten round to it

\*You can find out more about this view in our segmentation of young people on page 22.

# Climate awareness

The vast majority of young people believe climate change is happening now, that it is a global climate crisis, and they acknowledge a human component in climate change. Whilst young people are concerned about it, for many it remains a distant issue – for now they have more pressing priorities in their day-to-day life.



## Young people's priorities: where does climate change fit?

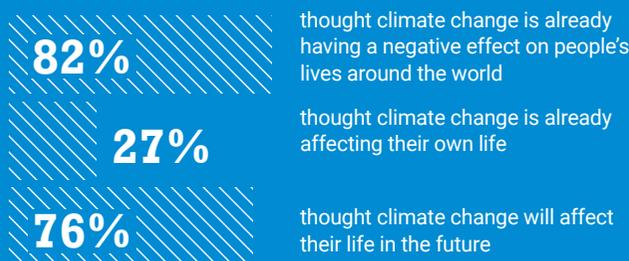


## Do young people have an awareness of...

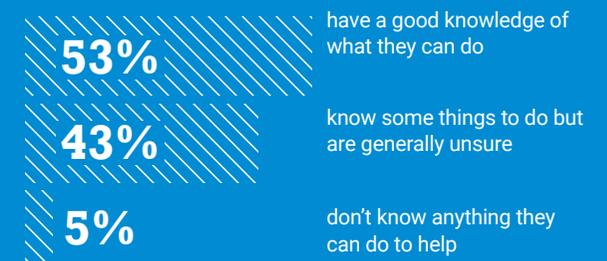
### ...our impact on climate change?



### ...how climate change affects people?



### ...the individual actions they could take to help combat climate change?



## SPOTLIGHTING VIEWS

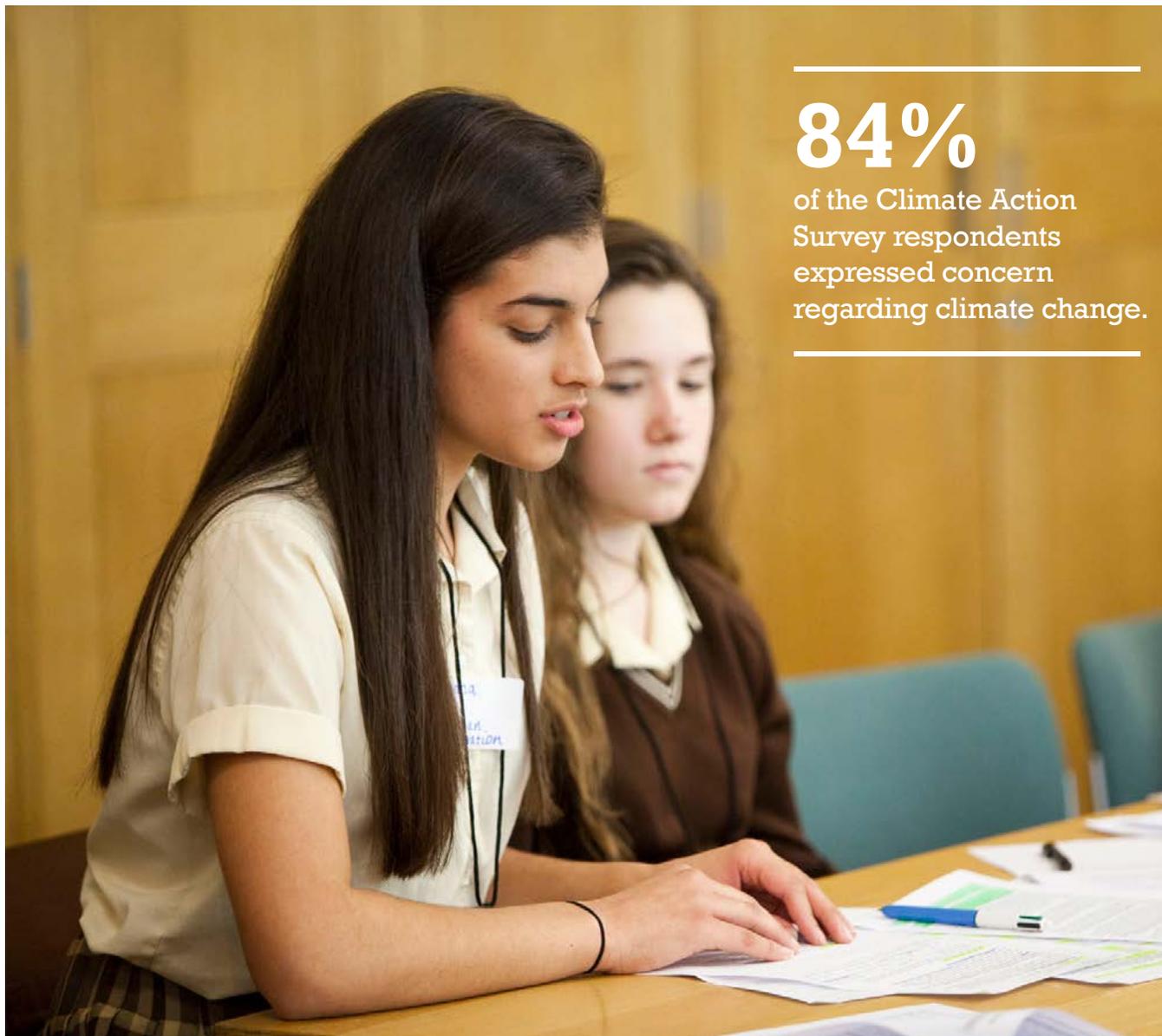
### Climate change concern

**84% of the Climate Action Survey respondents expressed concern regarding climate change.** There was a clear correlation between the more concerned a respondent was with the more likely they were to be acting on climate change: 92% of those young people already taking climate action expressed concern about climate change, compared to 72% of those not yet acting.

For the majority of respondents minimising damage to the environment featured as a priority. However, much more pressing priorities were friends and family, and education.

Our findings echo a study by Lee et al (2020) which explores the concerns and priorities of young students. Although they found that the students did express some genuine concern regarding climate change, ultimately students were more likely to prioritise their education and upcoming exams because they required more immediate attention. In contrast, young people are less likely to prioritise the environment and climate change as the risks do not seem as obvious or instantaneous to children often living sheltered lives in western and developed countries (Odzem et al., 2014). As a result, the climate crisis is considered more of a distant threat. The Climate Action Survey saw 27% of respondents report that climate change is already affecting their own life, compared with 76% saying it will affect their life in the future.

When viewed alongside their other priorities, it may be that young people will be more receptive and motivated to measures if they are framed around co-benefits or win-wins for things that matter to them right now.



## Trusted sources

Schools are the foremost source of climate change information for their students. They are also the most trusted source, and provide the most inspiration, with teachers frequently being cited in the open comments as role models. This suggests that the school curriculum is making an impact on young people but also indicates that schools can, and individual teachers already do, play a vital role in mobilising action on climate change.

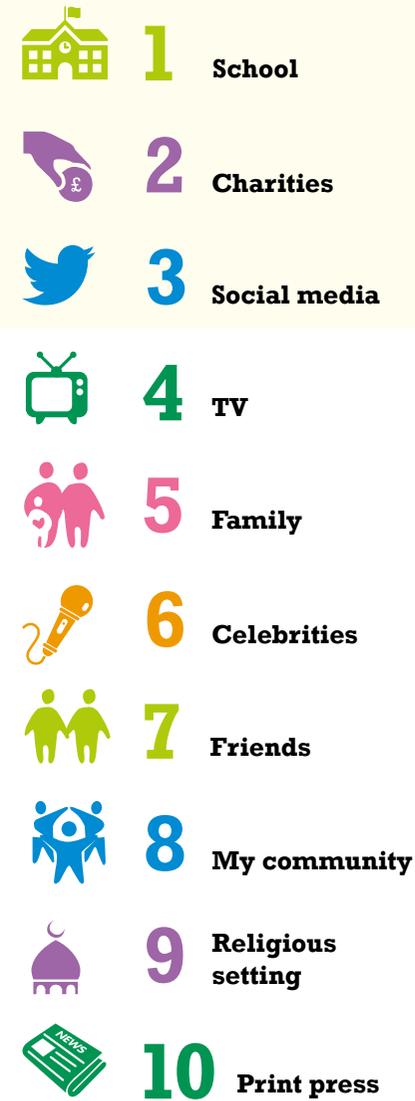
### Where do young people hear climate change talked about the most?



### Which information sources do young people trust?



### Who inspires young people to get involved in climate action?



### Which information sources do young people see as the most representative (age, gender, race)?





## SPOTLIGHTING VIEWS



Greta Thunberg provides a voice for young people and has also brought to my attention that change needs to happen now in order to have any hope of a climate change free future.

## Trusted Sources

Numerous studies indicate that receptivity to climate messaging is heavily influenced by the perceived authority and trustworthiness of their sources. Climate Outreach, in their work on the key role of public engagement in delivering net zero say,

***“When the messages are uncomfortable and the messengers aren’t perceived to be trusted, or part of a citizen’s ‘in group’ there is a strong tendency to ‘other’ them and place them and their messages in the ‘out group’. This phenomenon is repeatedly identified as a key factor in polarisation and one those opposed to climate action will often exploit.”***

ICN’s Climate Action Survey reveals young people’s trusted messengers, and climate influencers, to be people of immediate importance in their lives, notably teachers and families. Over a fifth of respondents specifically mentioned school, and importantly their teachers, as having influenced their views on climate change.

***“My teachers at school, they are very strong advocates for becoming more green and have started so many***

***climate saving initiatives in our school! I am so grateful to them.”***

***“My dad makes a huge effort in the house to help the climate movement .... This affects me positively because he’s always supportive about new changes to lifestyle and likes to talk about it. He’s hopeful about the movement and this inspires me.”***

Beyond such immediate influences, charities and climate advocates have a significant effect on young people’s perspectives of climate change. Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough were mentioned by nearly a quarter of respondents as individuals who had influenced their thinking on climate change.

***“David Attenborough has made a big influence on many with the information and warnings he gives on TV. He tells people of the dangers clearly and then tells us how we can do something to fix it, whereas other sources will just give us negative information and say, “we’re all doomed” but they never actually tell us what to do about it.”***

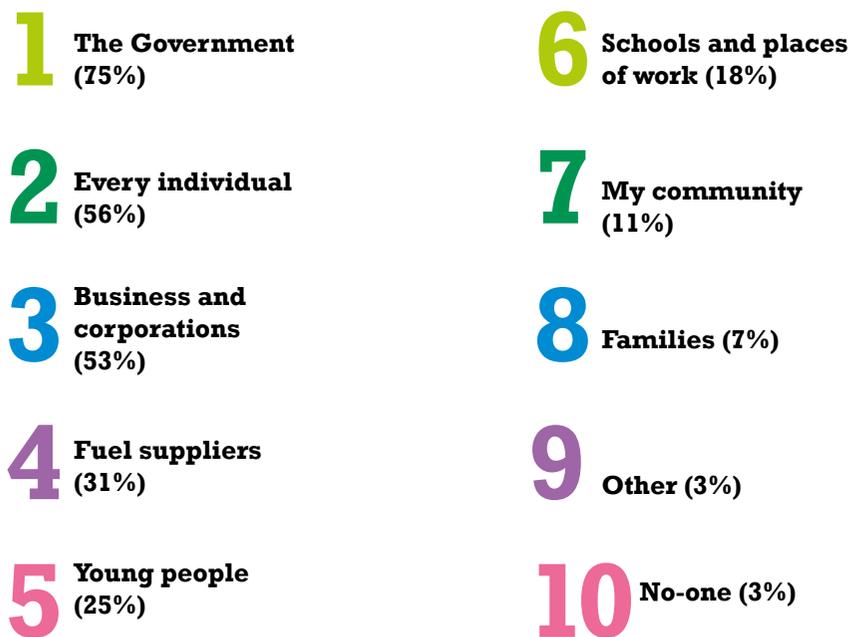
***“I think that Greta Thunberg has made a huge difference. She has stood up for something she believes in and is an amazing person. I went to see her at a climate change march with some of my friends and my mum and it was an absolutely amazing experience!”***

Social media engagement by such activists as Thunberg and Attenborough has fuelled dissemination through such networks and enabled them to become major sources of climate information. There is evidence that such work has played a prominent role in elevating the climate crises to a more immediate danger rather than a ‘distant threat’ (Leiserowitz et al., 2013). Exposure can also be seen to encourage activist activities in adolescents - Saberwal et al. (2021) found familiarity with Thunberg was a positive indicator of young people’s likelihood to take collective action and believe in their own agency to effect change. However, wider academic literature has confirmed barriers to social media engagement among young people exist, notably the digital divide and a lack of diversity in the activists that dominate the climate messaging.

## Power to effect change

There were diverse views around climate change responsibility, yet three clear strands emerged. Firstly, whilst the Government is seen as having the most power to change the course of climate change for the better, young people show a real depth of understanding about the complexity and interconnected nature of this challenge. Many strongly advocate that we all, from large businesses to every individual, have a part to play, and joined-up actions are needed to make a real difference. Secondly, as young people are the ones who are going to have to live with the reality of climate change, they feel their views should have more of an influence. Thirdly, there are perceptions of inadequate action by adults, businesses and governments, and this is leading to disempowerment (explored in Spotlighting views: Youth disempowerment, P15).

### Who do young people believe has the most power to change the course of climate change for the better?



### Young people were given the opportunity to openly respond in more detail. Over 1000 gave considered responses and a sample is showcased here....



The Government can change rules and they are an important group who can speak out and can be listened to. Businesses and corporations can change the products they sell to make them more environmentally friendly. Every individual can make a difference because everyone has a voice and has the power to speak out about what's right.



We need to pressure those in power to make responsible, long-term decisions to combat climate change.



I personally believe the public's hand needs to be forced, legislation such as increased taxation on products with high carbon emissions. This would restrict businesses by giving a financial incentive to reach net-zero and also on consumers by increasing the prices of goods and services that have detrimental effects on the planet.



Young people are the ones who I think will be affected the most, meaning they should have the power that allows them to change the situation.



I feel that the young generation should have the biggest say in what happens according to climate change and that they need to be made more aware or more educated on the problem and the solutions. Although we need the young generation to be aware all individuals must do their part as well.



Young people care the most I think as it is our future, I also think young people are a strong force to be reckoned with. Schools and places of work have the opportunity to inspire and educate. The Government are the people with the truest power, they can activate the change we all need.



Businesses and governments are the ones with power to change things, but they only have that power because ordinary people support them. We need to pressure those in power to make responsible, long-term decisions to combat climate change.

## SPOTLIGHTING VIEWS

### Youth disempowerment

The Climate Action Survey reinforces a key finding from within academia: that many young people are aware of climate change but do not feel they have the agency to effect change. Whilst 84% of ICN's survey respondents said they are concerned about climate change:

- **Feeling powerless** was the main reason given by respondents as to why they are not yet engaged in action (32%). This was almost equalled by the proportion believing that individual actions will not make a substantive difference (31%).
- **Only 25%** of all respondents felt that 'young people have the power to change the course of climate change for the better.'
- **Few students felt that they can make a positive difference on climate change** within their own social group: only 10% thought they could make a 'big difference' on climate change with their friends, 14% with their family, 14% with their community, and 15% with their school.

There are a multitude of underlying social and behavioural reasons for such feelings of powerlessness, many of which are beyond the scope of this survey. Yet, if **one clear theme emerged from the responses it is the perception of inadequate action by adults, businesses and governments.**

The survey indicates that young people credit individuals as having a leading role in changing the course of climate change. Yet, they observe that individual changes unaccompanied by structural transformations are insufficient to address the crisis. Governments, alongside businesses and corporations, play a crucial role in delivering such changes by reducing their own emissions and supporting individual change. Respondents expect such institutions to deliver meaningful policy and action in pursuit of these goals.

*"It's hard for individuals to act as an organised team unless there's a stronger framework for them set up by institutions responsible for them, and who govern their lives."*

**Individuals can't do it on their own. The government and organisations need to change the way they operate so that they have less negative impact on the environment.**



Many respondents, rated the governmental and business response to climate change negatively. They do not feel that governments and businesses are taking sufficient action to mitigate their current and historic contributions to climate change, noting the failure of business and government to enforce change through both voluntary and legislative means. A key perception is the primacy of profit over environmental concerns. Additionally, young people perceive that large organisations are unfairly shifting much of the emphasis for climate change and emissions reduction to the individual, thus limiting their own responsibility.

These perceptions are leading many young people to feel disenchanted with authority figures and large organisations, fuelling anger, disillusionment and crucially disempowerment. These feelings act as a barrier and are hindering young people's engagement with climate action. Not only are they preventing active engagement, they are also inhibiting those already engaged from feeling positive about the difference they are making. Ultimately, how can individual action be meaningful when much larger players, with greater resources and responsibility, are not participating as they should?

*"If what young people said could prevent climate change and make a "difference", shouldn't it have stopped by now...?? Ultimately, in this world, power and money is what really matters, as evident from everything going on around the world.... After all, we are just school kids, what we do doesn't decide anything."*

*"Big corporations love to push the responsibility on to the individual but in reality, they have a much larger negative impact."*



*"Most of the effects caused so far by climate change were already known by fuel corporations and businesses like Shell, who could have made changes to help the environment, chose not to in favour of profit. It is important for us to make lifestyle changes but in reality, we need to see a change from the top."*

*"I feel that an individual and their choices no longer have the ability to affect climate change in any significant way. With the majority of carbon emissions coming from just a few companies, it no longer matters what I or any individual person does or buys, it is the responsibility of politicians to actually affect climate change."*



Big businesses are the ones doing all the damage and do nothing about it. The government are also being useless.

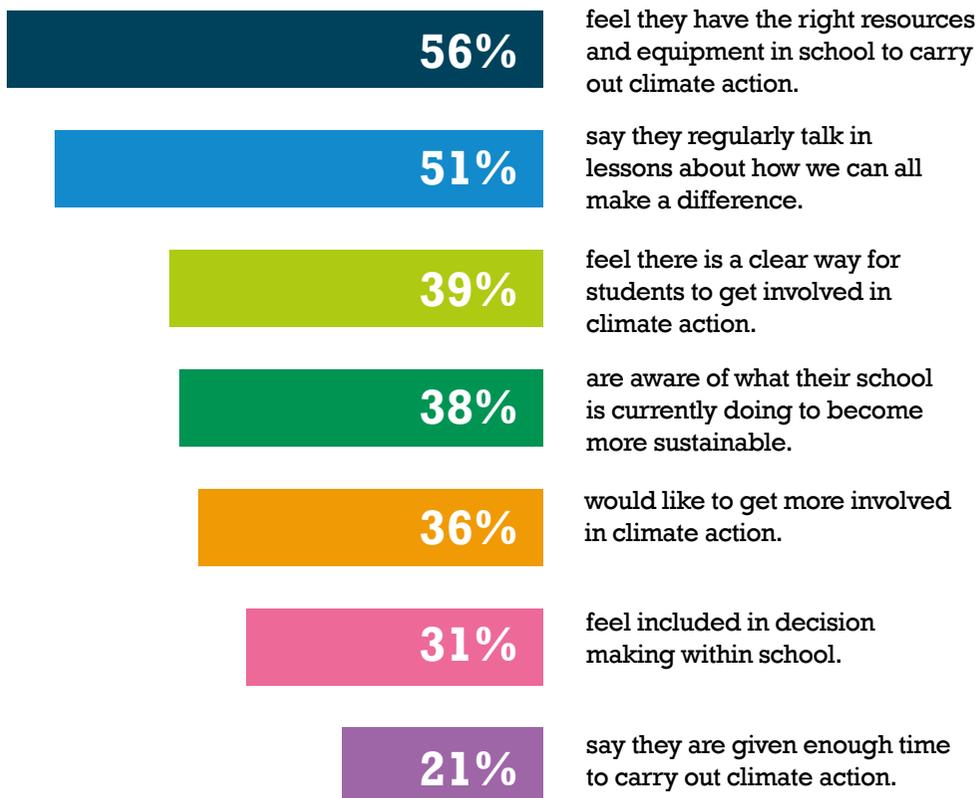


If the government set more rules or spread more awareness then maybe we could make more of an impact quicker.

## Climate action in school

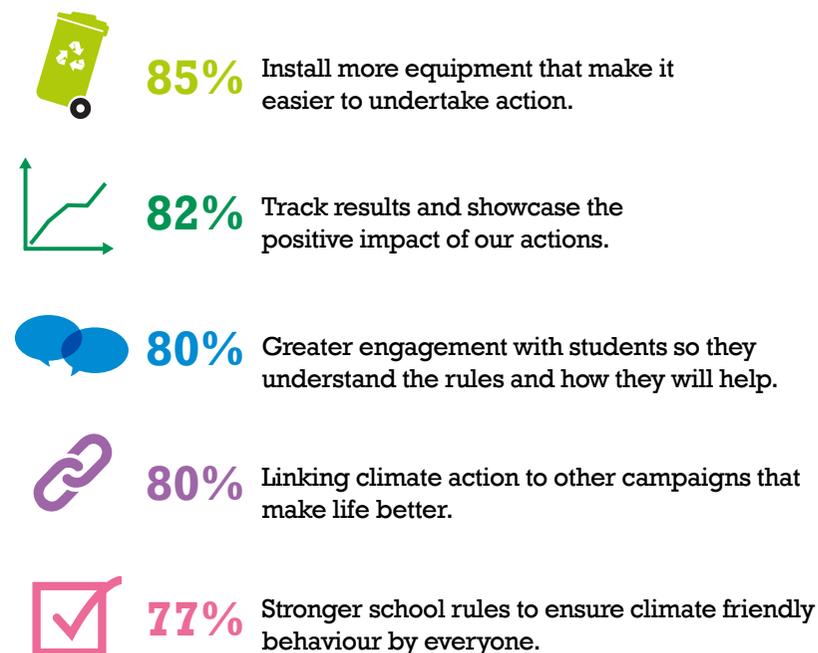
There are significant barriers to climate action in a secondary school context and these can be seen as indicative of our responses to change in many other institutions. Whilst some schools are very active, some are only marginally engaged in the face of multiple priorities. Time is a massive issue, both for education about climate change and to take forward actions.

### How do young people see climate action in their school?



### What do young people say would motivate them to act in school?

We identified five approaches\* that could be applied to make schools more sustainable. For each approach we asked respondents the extent to which they felt they would motivate them to take climate action. Below are the top 5 choices selected, see Appendix 1 for the full list of results.



\*You can find details of the approaches identified here:  
[Climate-Action-Survey-approaches-to-motivating-students.pdf \(interclimate.org\)](#)

## SPOTLIGHTING VIEWS



If young people (in schools) are thoroughly educated on the topic of climate change, then I believe that a big difference can be made.

Climate Action Survey respondent

## Role of schools in motivating youth climate action

Secondary education is ideally situated to develop young people's knowledge and skills regarding climate change and facilitate their involvement in climate action and decision-making. For young people, school is a foremost source of trusted information, and where they hear climate change talked about the most. Crucially, **schools inspire young people to get involved in climate action, notably through the exemplary work of individual teachers and leaders** (see Spotighting views: Trusted sources P13). Consistent and visible leadership around sustainability and meaningful action is especially important for young people who are not supported to carry out action at home.

However, of the Climate Action Survey respondents **79% are not yet acting in school. A clear gap exists between knowledge and engaging young people in action**, with students indicating: lack of clarity about what their school is doing to make a difference; little or no time for them to help the transition towards Net Zero; and limited ways to have a say in decisions.

Wider research emphasises that whilst many teachers are passionately supportive, others may not be as confident: Teach the Future reported that seven in 10 UK teachers say they have not received adequate training to educate their students on the climate crisis.

Climate change education should become more integrated in the mainstream curriculum – a thread through all subjects. It is vital that teachers are properly equipped with the accurate climate change knowledge prior to teaching their students, but also that schools go beyond delivering information to assist young people to get involved in pro-environmental behaviour.

Academia reinforces the importance of giving young people the opportunity to share and act on their concerns about climate change, as such activity has been found to boost their wellbeing and resilience (Hart, Fisher, & Kimiagar, 2014; Ojala, 2012; Sanson et al., 2019).

- It is argued (Berse, 2017, p.217) that collective problem-focused coping strategies are more successful for building hope due to climate change being 'a collective problem', thus students are more inclined to get involved (Ojala, 2012, p.543).
- Additionally, students realise that if everyone engages in climate action, the bigger the impact will be, wherein emotion-focused coping tends to de-emphasise the problem by avoiding it and prioritising other aspects in life (Ojala, 2012).

Clear ways to motivate action have been voiced by young people through this survey, that have significant potential to positively influence the whole school and its own carbon reduction planning (see Table 4: Climate Activation Framework and Appendix I for full details).

This constitutes a call to action to help build young people's capacity, and to empower them to be effectively engaged in joint efforts to mitigate climate change.



## SECTION B

## BARRIERS TO YOUTH CLIMATE ACTION

In order to determine the best approach to enabling more young people to carry out climate action we need to understand the audience and make a diagnosis of what is preventing climate-friendly action in the first place. To achieve this ICN analysed the Climate Action Survey data, outlined in Section A, by using the COM-B ('capability', 'opportunity', 'motivation' and 'behaviour') model, as defined within The Behaviour Change Wheel. This model recognises that for any behaviour to be enacted people must have the capability, and the opportunity, and they must be more motivated to undertake that behaviour than any other. Thus, achieving behaviour change can be thought of as like opening a COMBination lock: all relevant enablers need to be in place. If just one of these is not in place, then the desired change will not occur.

**From our systematic analysis ICN has identified four common barriers that hinder youth climate action:** lack of knowledge about actions and their impact; insufficient opportunity to act; lack of a supportive community; and difficulty in remaining positive that individual action can make a difference to the climate crisis. These are outlined in Table 1: Common barriers to youth climate action.

**The level of detail in the data analysis also allowed us to segment the responses of young people** into broad groups according to their beliefs on climate change, alongside how motivated and involved in climate action they already are. Going forward, understanding these different starting points helps us to engage these different groups of young people in the most effective way. These are outlined in Table 2: Young people can be grouped into core segments.

**TABLE 1 Common barriers to youth climate action**

### Not enough opportunity to carry out action

79% of respondents are not taking climate action in their school. A strong inference from the survey is that young people lack sufficient opportunity to engage in action within secondary school. We define opportunity as access to actions that are accessible and affordable (in both a monetary and time sense).

- Tellingly, **79% reported they were not given enough time to carry out climate action in school.**
- 85% of respondents also stated that they would be more motivated to act if schools 'installed more equipment that makes it easier to undertake action.'

### Lack of a supportive community of action

Being part of a group activity that places an emphasis on climate-friendly actions is shown to be a strong motivator for young people. This holds true whether at school, in the community or at home. Such networks often feature effective leadership from trusted role models and help young people to see the positive differences resulting from their decisions and climate actions. Yet, many respondents do not seem to have access to a supportive community of action. Without such networks, many are left to act alone or not at all, with only a small minority reporting the ability to undertake action with friends.

- **Within homes, of the respondents not yet acting, only 25% reported that their families were engaged in climate change.** From such data we may draw an inference that without familial support it is difficult for young people to become involved.
- **Within schools, 69% feel excluded from decision-making** and 61% feel there is no clear way for students to get involved in climate action.
- **Within wider society** many feel let down by government and business who, they believe, are not providing effective leadership on the climate crisis (see *Spotlighting Views: Youth disempowerment*, P15).



## Lack of knowledge about actions and their impact

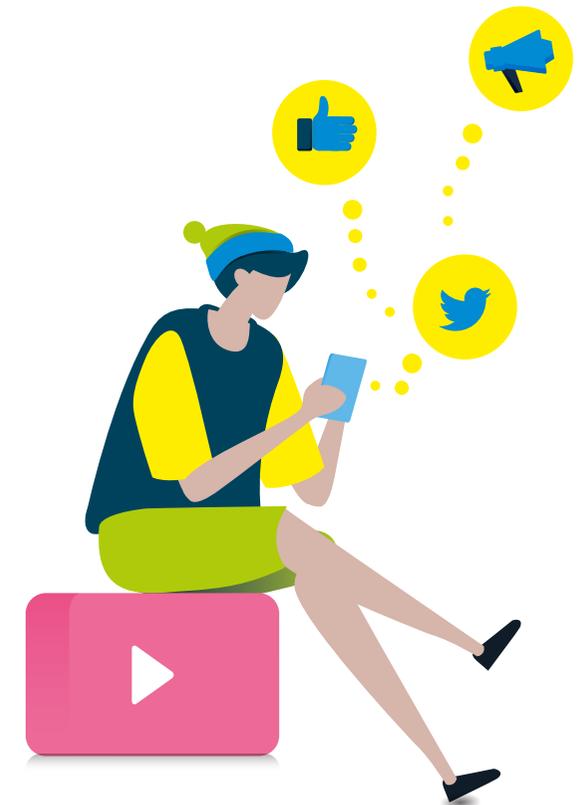
Most young people in the survey recognise the need for collective action to combat climate change. This is informed by a comprehensive awareness and generally sound scientific understanding of the causes and effects of climate change. However, 48% of respondents were uncertain about what they could do at an individual level to mitigate contributions. The survey clearly indicates that:

- **A tendency for action rests on robust climate knowledge.**
- Yet, **possession of such knowledge does not automatically prompt climate action.** This was demonstrated by those respondents that are not yet engaged in action as 39% reported but yet they had a 'good knowledge of what I can do.'
- The provision of information and advice is vitally important, but if other enablers are missing it does not appear to be enough to significantly drive climate action amongst this demographic.

## Difficulty in feeling positive that individual action can make a difference to the climate crisis.

Numerous intrinsic and interlinked behavioural factors play a role in young people's lack of motivation to take individual action to help mitigate climate change. Notable observations from the survey (which are further explored in Table 2) are:

- **Feeling concerned:** concern and prioritisation clearly affect young people's engagement in climate action (explored in Spotlighting views: Climate concern P10).
- **Habitual processes:** Whilst the respondents who are acting showed they have long-formed habits at home such as recycling, climate activity outside the home is not yet an 'everyday' habit that is part of young people's common social narratives.
- **Confidence to act:** Significantly, many young people do not have confidence in their capability, competency and agency to effect change or in the efficacy of their actions. This includes intuitive feelings about the potential ineffectiveness of individual actions – that they will not make a difference - and self-doubt surrounding their potential to positively influence others (explored in Spotlighting views: Youth disempowerment, P15.)



**TABLE 2** Young people can be divided into four core groups



## Acting

These students, who are already carrying out climate action:

- Are the most concerned about climate change.
- Strongly see the human impact on climate change, including their own personal impact.
- See 'causing less damage to the environment' as more of a day-to-day priority than the other segments.
- Are more aware of what they can do to address the Climate Emergency.
- **Feel they can make a positive impact on climate change and influence others.**
- Are much more likely to feel they have support from others to carry out action.

**57%** of respondents were in this segment



## Ready for action

These students, who are not yet carrying out any climate action:

- Are concerned with climate change, but do not feel as strongly as the 'acting' segment.
- Strongly see the human impact on climate change, however they do not understand their own personal impact as much as the 'acting' segment.
- Causing less damage to the environment is less of a day-to-day priority than the acting group.
- Would like to undertake climate action but are often **unsure of what to do or have not gotten round to it yet.**

**10%** of respondents were in this segment



## Not yet ready for action

These students who are not yet carrying out any climate action:

- Are concerned with climate change, and do recognise the human impact on climate change.
- Have a more limited understanding of how climate change is affecting people right now, and how our everyday choices are contributing to climate change.
- Are more likely to feel climate change is **not their responsibility.**
- Often **feel powerless to make a difference.** They think their individual actions will not make a difference and that they have little influence on others.

**25%** of respondents were in this segment



## The sceptics

These students say they are not yet carrying out action because they do not believe in climate change.

This is a much more difficult group to engage with, and as there were not many students in this group, going forward we have decided not to focus on them. However, focusing on the other segments may well have a spill over effect of changing the 'sceptics' views and behaviours as well.

**8%** of respondents were in this segment

## ENABLING CLIMATE ACTION

The aim of the entire Climate Action Survey is to be able to inform young people about the most relevant and likely ways to encourage their peers, and the whole school community, to be climate friendly. Perhaps most important then, is this concluding section in which we set out how to overcome the barriers to climate action (explored in Table 1) by 'flipping' them into positive ways to engage young people. These are outlined in Table 3: Enablers for Action.

The Climate Action Framework\* outlined in Table 4 connects these 'enablers for action' to each segment of students (outlined in Table 2). We believe this framework provides a critical starting point for students, and their teachers, as it shows how everybody can be brought onboard and take part in climate-friendly action.

When it comes to changing behaviours, the way that you do it matters. A range of techniques, from education and incentivisation to environmental restructuring and modelling, will therefore need to be employed for each activity outlined in the framework. ICN are looking to develop a toolkit to support student groups with this task.

The approach can also be used more widely in communities, for instance by Councils, who are looking to engage with young people in their quest to achieve Net Zero.

\* ICN's framework was based on and supported by GlobeScan who went through a similar process with IKEA: [IKEA-GlobeScan\\_Climate\\_Action\\_Report\\_Sept2018.pdf](#)



**TABLE 3** Enablers for action

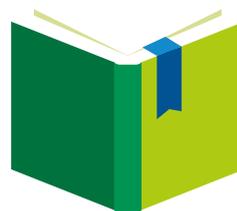
## Opportunity

Young people need more structures in place (notably time and resources) so that they have the opportunity to do things differently, and importantly that it becomes easy to do so.



## Community

Young people need a community that supports them to undertake climate friendly activity, and importantly a 'culture' and expectation of sustainability should run through schools. Young people need to see what others are doing, to learn from, and encourage each other.



## Knowledge

Young people need to have a greater understanding of the potential impact of climate change, but more importantly, to be clear about the everyday actions that will make the most difference, and then have the skills to do them.



## Being Positive

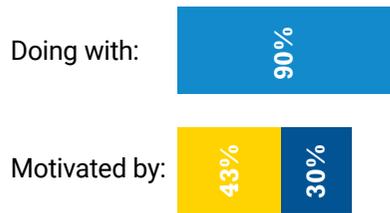
More young people need to establish climate action as a priority that they 'want' to do, and feel positive and stay motivated because of the difference they are making.

**TABLE 4**    **Climate Activation Framework**

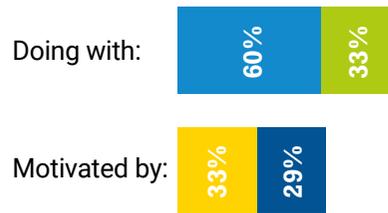
	 <b>Opportunity</b> What needs to be in place to help students do more.	 <b>Community</b> What would support each segment to take action.	 <b>Knowledge</b> What would increase each segment's understanding.	 <b>Being Positive</b> What would help each segment connect positively and stay motivated.
 <b>Acting</b>	<p>More opportunity is needed across all segments, notably:</p> <p><b>Time</b></p> <p><b>01</b> All students need and want <b>more time in school</b> to carry out climate action.</p> <p><b>Resources:</b></p> <p><b>02</b> Actual changes (equipment and structures) so it is easy for students to make climate friendly choices.</p>	<p>This group would welcome:</p> <p><b>C1 Strong links with school leadership</b> to bring action into school practice, for instance through policies.</p> <p><b>C2 Being part of a wider movement at school and in the community</b>, e.g. using social media to share and encourage further action.</p>	<p><b>K1 Provide information on climate-friendly actions</b> that can be taken in school and the local community, not just at home. Make clear how impactful each action is.</p>	<p><b>P1 Regularly monitor and give updates</b> to show that climate-friendly actions, especially led by young people, are making a difference – their actions really are worth it!</p>
 <b>Ready for action</b>	<p><b>03</b> Understand and <b>tackle any specific reasons that stop students from taking up existing actions</b>, such as using school buses or choosing non-meat lunch.</p>	<p><b>C3 Build on the trust in school</b> (as a source of information) with teachers as inspiring role models, showing leadership.</p> <p><b>C4 Include these students in decision making</b>, ensuring that they see their views matter.</p> <p><b>C5 Encourage student to student learning by talking about action</b>, across all subjects and in tutor groups.</p>	<p><b>K2 Provide information on climate-friendly actions we can all do to help</b>, both in school and outside school.</p>	<p><b>P2 Emphasise how action can also be good for other important things</b> like protecting wildlife, saving money, health benefits etc (known as co-benefits).</p> <p><b>P3 Reinforce (and reward) actions</b> by showing how they really do make a difference.</p>
 <b>Not yet ready to act</b>	<p><b>04 Students need 'rewards' and reminders</b> to keep doing climate action.</p>	<p><b>C7</b> As in the above group, <b>encourage student to student learning</b> by talking about action, for instance across all subjects and in tutor groups.</p> <p><b>C8</b> As in the above, <b>include this group of students in decision making</b>.</p>	<p><b>K3</b> Focus on ongoing messages that show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How climate change is affecting people right now.</li> <li>• How our everyday choices contribute to climate change.</li> <li>• Climate-friendly actions we can all do to help.</li> </ul>	<p><b>P4 Emphasise how action can also be good for other important things</b> like protecting wildlife, saving money, health benefits etc (co-benefits).</p> <p><b>P5 Highlight the real influence students can have on their family and friends</b> to make a positive difference on climate change.</p>

Of the 57% of young people who are already taking climate action, who are they predominantly acting with and what are their main motivations to do this action?

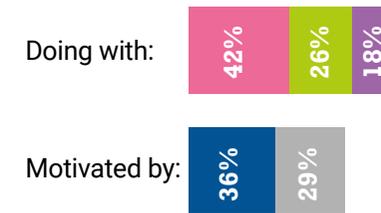
 **97%** Supporting action at home



 **50%** Changing their diet to make it more environmentally friendly



 **27%** Climate strikes/campaigning



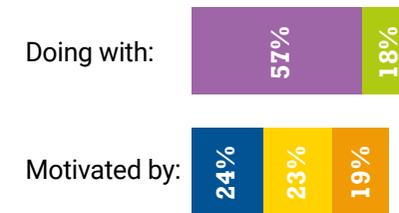
 **72%** Thinking about the effect of what they buy and use on the environment



 **36%** Supporting action at school



 **23%** Supporting action in the community



Options given to the respondents were:

- Doing with:  Alone  Organisation within school  Organisation outside of school  Friends  Family.
- Motivated by:  Specific people  Fears/hope for the future  Family/friends influence  Media influence  Other.

## APPENDIX 2

## Climate action in school

We identified five approaches that could be applied to make secondary schools more sustainable. For each approach we asked respondents the extent to which they felt these approaches would motivate them to take climate action. In Section A we outlined the top 5 choices selected, and below we have provided the full list of results.

	This would motivate me	This might motivate me	I would ignore this approach	Don't know
<b>Policy and rules that ensure climate friendly behaviour</b>				
Greater engagement with students so they understand the rules and how they will help.	32%	47%	9%	11%
Stronger school rules to ensure climate friendly behaviour by everyone.	29%	48%	11%	12%
More opportunities for students to feed in and influence rules and targets.	26%	44%	17%	14%
<b>More positive communication around climate change</b>				
Track results and showcase the positive impact of our actions.	42%	40%	7%	11%
Linking climate action to other campaigns that make life better.	34%	46%	9%	11%
<b>Social influence</b>				
Rewards and competitions to encourage action.	37%	40%	14%	8%
Hear from inspiring (local) people about the positive difference they are making.	23%	42%	22%	13%
Access to more groups and activities to discuss and carry out action.	20%	42%	24%	14%
<b>More and better education about climate change and what action to take</b>				
Sustainability taught across all subjects.	30%	44%	13%	13%
Careers guidance on 'green' skills and jobs that are going to be needed.	27%	43%	15%	15%
<b>Structural changes that make it easier to do the right thing</b>				
Install more equipment that make it easier to undertake action.	46%	39%	7%	9%
Introduce changes that we are not really aware of.	31%	32%	24%	13%
Have student monitors.	21%	38%	26%	15%