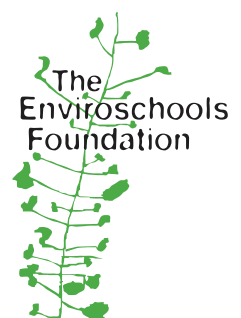


THRIVING NOW FOR THE FUTURE: Education for the 21st Century

Policy priorities for candidates in the 2011 New Zealand general Election.



Education for a rapidly changing world

Education is an investment today for a future with improved social and economic prosperity. We want people to thrive while safeguarding our natural capital. But the world is rapidly changing. New Zealand is facing growing global challenges such as financial instability, climate change, water scarcity, loss of cultural diversity and geopolitical shifts in power.

Right now we are hearing calls from business leaders, communities and governments around the world for ‘green growth’ and a ‘green economy.’ Leaders can see new opportunities for employment, health and liveability—and the damage that we will do to our economies if we keep harming our environment.

Sustainability education is a response to this call and needs to be at the core of our education system.

How to help New Zealand thrive

Sustainability education takes place throughout all sectors of society and involves people of all ages and contexts. The policy framework outlined in this document looks at one strand within this, the formal education system which includes early childhood through to tertiary, in both English and Māori medium.

Education for sustainability is already taking place in many schools, kura (Māori-language immersion schools) and early childhood centres. But sustainability is not part of the Government’s vision for education.

Government needs to recognise that sustainability is essential for every student’s education and for New Zealand’s future. We urge the next Government to prioritise the following three policies:

1. **Instigate a working group for 21st century learning** to explore emerging education models and how these could contribute to sustainability, a culture of learning and a world-leading education system.
2. **Support teaching for sustainability in schools, kura and early childhood centres** by making sustainability a part of all new teachers’ training, funding professional development, and establishing a Sustainability Education Fund to support community initiatives working with schools, kura and early childhood centres.
3. **Make sustainability a priority in tertiary education** via the Tertiary Education Commission, so that graduates will be able to participate in and contribute to green growth whatever their profession.

“There are compelling arguments that the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century—social, environmental, economic, and political—are so different from those of the past that they require us to seriously rethink the way we support young people to meet them.”

New Zealand Council for Educational Research (2011)

“...our environmental stewardship has been subject to critical scrutiny. And we can expect more of this as the world shifts increasingly to Green Growth...”

New Zealand Government Green Growth Advisory Group (2011)

Why we need to act now

New Zealand's economic future depends on education for sustainability.

Our economic wealth is based on the quality of our natural capital and people's abilities to innovate. International markets are challenging our environmental credentials. We need to improve our environmental stewardship and take advantage of green business opportunities. Education will play an essential role in these endeavours.

Sustainability education is quality education that benefits all people.

It brings out the full potential of people by making learning personal, relevant and action-oriented. It fosters creativity, critical inquiry, imagination and 'futures thinking' to create novel solutions. It grows empathy, ecological awareness and community involvement. It respects indigenous knowledge alongside other forms of knowledge. It combines the academic and practical skills that people need to sustain life.

New Zealand policy needs to catch up.

We are over half way through the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). Many countries have developed strategies and action plans during this decade. For example the Australian Government has invested in:

- *Education for a sustainable future* (2005): a nationally agreed vision and framework for environmental education through all years of schooling.
- *Living Sustainably* (2009): a National Action Plan that covers the formal education sector, local government and business.
- *Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative*: a partnership between the federal and state governments to support all Australian schools and communities in becoming sustainable. It provides practical support to schools with resources, mentoring and professional development.

There is high demand for sustainability education right now.

Over 800 schools, kura and early childhood centres are involved in the *Enviroschools, Te Aho Tū Roa* network alone. Many more are attracted by the benefits that these learning centres are showing including engaged students, improved physical surroundings, financial savings and greater community involvement. The demand to participate in education for sustainability exceeds the capacity that programmes can currently deliver.

We have the programmes, the networks and the experience to be a global leader in sustainability education.

Many innovative programmes have been developed over the last decade. Because sustainability is a multi-faceted area, no one person or agency can provide the total support necessary for comprehensive education. Teachers need support from a range of people and organisations. This is why many highly effective sustainability programmes in the formal education sector are delivered by Non Government Organisations (NGOs), local government, Department of Conservation, and community groups - often in collaboration.

Local government plays a significant and valuable role. Around 80% of local government agencies support sustainability education in their region, as a tool to achieve social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being.

"International benchmarks and recent media coverage overseas have exposed a gap between New Zealand's clean, green rhetoric and reality... We simply can't afford to let our reputation, and consequently our exporters, suffer because of a lack of environmental leadership."

Pure Advantage Chairman Rob Morrison

"The principles and practical application of 'education for sustainability' ... have, in recent years, been recognised internationally as fundamentally important to addressing the critical global challenges we all face."

Australian Government (2009)

Government priorities for progress

Central Government has a key role to play.

Demand for sustainability education is growing, yet central government support has fallen dramatically in recent years. By implementing the priorities in this document, central government can take full advantage of the experience and momentum generated by many years of hard work.

Now is the time to invest in our country's future.

PRIORITY ONE

Instigate a Working Group for 21st Century Learning

Our education system was designed in the 20th century and it urgently needs to adapt for the 21st century. We need to make learning meaningful for new generations of students, to keep pace with new technologies and to prepare graduates for the many jobs and career opportunities that do not currently exist. Through education, students can develop a clear understanding of themselves and their purpose in the world.

Leading educators agree on the need for people to develop their abilities as lifelong learners who can collaborate well together. Employers want skilled staff; competent and innovative people with problem solving abilities. This is also essential for sustainability. New Zealand needs people with strong adaptive and creative abilities to resolve the social, economic and environmental challenges of our time

In other words, we need a 21st century education system that puts just as much emphasis on *how* people learn as *what* people learn.

The Government needs to:

- **Instigate a working group** to catalyse dialogue and recommend actions for a world-leading education system with sustainability at its core that develops the full potential of young New Zealanders.
- **Ensure that the working group has wide representation** from communities, iwi, businesses, local and central government, schools, kura, early childhood, tertiary institutes and NGOs with a diverse range of ideas, knowledge and experience.
- **Adequately resource the working group** to explore best practice from New Zealand and around the world and identify how quality education with sustainability at its core can contribute to key government goals.
- **Enable the working group to make recommendations** about appropriate policy, and to make linkages with other Government initiated groups, such as the Green Growth Advisory Group.

“Questions about the causes and effects of climate change, the potential and ethics of genetic modification, and the safety and sustainability of sources of energy become more pressing all the time as the long-term future of life on earth is no longer taken for granted. People need to be aware of the issues, have some ability to critically evaluate information and be equipped to participate in debates and influence policy on these and other important matters.”

*Sir Peter Gluckman (2011)
The Prime Minister's Chief
Scientific Advisor*

PRIORITY TWO

Support Teaching for Sustainability in Schools, Kura, and Early Childhood Centres

Sustainability has been a significant theme of the *New Zealand Curriculum* since 2007 and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (the national curriculum for Māori-medium) since 2008. Sustainability is integral to the vision, principles, values and key competencies for students. It provides an essential context across all learning areas. Sustainability also fits well with the holistic approach of *Te Whāriki* (the curriculum framework for the Early Childhood Education sector).

Research commissioned by the Ministry of Education highlighted the educational benefits when teachers are well supported in education for sustainability initiatives. However, because sustainability is a recent addition to the curriculum, **most teachers are unfamiliar with the principles and practices of sustainability in education.** It has not been part of their training.

To fulfil the vision of New Zealand's curriculum documents, new and existing teachers need to be supported in making sustainability a core part of every student's education.

The government needs to:

- **Make sustainability part of all new teachers' training**—by creating a Sustainability Capability Fund, through the Tertiary Education Commission, for teacher training organisations.
- **Provide professional development for existing teachers and whanau to deliver sustainability education**—by resourcing a network of skilled sustainability advisors and initiatives to provide practical assistance. This could be delivered as part of the revised School Support Services to strengthen school leadership, effective teaching and assessment.
- **Establish a Sustainability Education Fund** to support quality programmes from NGOs and community groups that are demonstrating excellent results.

“Findings show that [education for sustainability] initiatives... are empowering students to become strongly engaged in their learning and to think critically about issues; and the development of sustainable practices in schools and their communities.”

Ministry of Education Research Report (2010)

PRIORITY THREE

Make Sustainability a Priority in Tertiary Education

Government influences tertiary education through the *Tertiary Education Commission* and the *New Zealand Tertiary Education Strategy*.

The current *Tertiary Education Strategy (2010-2015)* mentions the role of research in addressing environmental challenges, but does not include any priorities for sustainability or our environment. This exposes our national environmental and sustainability 'brand' to a large amount of risk.

The challenges of sustainability are complex. People in all walks of life need to be equipped with knowledge of the broad issues, as well as more specialised knowledge and skills relevant to their career. Sustainability education is as applicable to a building apprenticeship as it is to an economics degree.

Further, an increasing number of students are finishing compulsory schooling having experienced sustainability education. These young people are actively seeking clear learning pathways that value and extend their sustainability knowledge.

The government needs to:

- Include environment and sustainability in the government's **vision** for tertiary education and **add sustainability to the priorities of the next *Tertiary Education Strategy***.
- Instruct the Tertiary Education Commission to **provide clear expectations** for tertiary education organisations **to include sustainability in education**, within a range of degree, technical and vocational programmes.
- **Monitor the sustainability performance** of tertiary education organisations, including courses, student support services, research and environmental/sustainability initiatives on campuses.

“High Quality Tertiary Education is central to helping New Zealand achieve its economic, social, cultural and environmental goals”

New Zealand Tertiary Education Strategy (2010-2015)

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