

Net zero education framework

A tool for curriculum designers (at multiple levels; teachers, schools, regions and countries) to support high quality net zero education.

What is net zero and why does it matter for curriculum design?

The amount of global warming depends on the total amount of CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere from human activities. Therefore, to stop temperatures rising and the resulting climate change, we need to reach a state of net zero, where CO₂ emissions are balanced by CO₂ removal.

All future generations need to understand what net zero is and the changes needed for it to be achieved, to mitigate against the increasing detrimental impacts on the global population that will occur in the event of inaction.

Net zero is a frame of reference: a state of balance in our climate system that can be maintained into the future that allows additional stability in environment and society. Net zero has a history, emerging from our understanding of what minimum intervention it is needed to meet a temperature goal, i.e. limiting warming to well under 2 degrees Celsius, and making efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Net zero embodies a diversity of scientific and political ideas: it is inherently interdisciplinary and is produced through and operationalised in complex systems that draw on the full range of disciplines. Net zero foregrounds questions of justice, addressing past and ongoing inequalities, responsibilities and vulnerabilities. Net zero is normative: the concept makes claims about what people and societies should do. Net zero is temporal: it requires thinking over multi-decadal time frames, while also calling for rapid reduction in CO₂ emissions. Net zero is dynamic: the concept has changed and has situated, place-based socio-political interpretations and paths to realisation.

Key attributes of net zero education

- Deeply engages students with the scientific basis of what is necessary to stop global warming
- Critically explores the historical and socio-political development of climate action
- Examines net zero as the current policy goal through a wide range of subjects across the social and natural sciences, arts and humanities
- Foregrounds issues about justice and fairness
- Situates net zero within broader socio-ecological challenges and ambitions
- Positions learning about net zero as a positive opportunity and empowers students with the knowledge, values and skills to participate meaningfully in climate solutions in their lives and careers