Natural History GCSE consultation: notes from Teach the Future on submitting a response

Teach the Future, along with Global Action Plan (GAP), hosted an online discussion on the proposed subject content for the new natural history GCSE. The event was attended by students, educators, academics and those working across the environmental, nature and education sectors. Bringing people together to share their perspectives and expertise, and to hear from others, will allow us to strengthen and align answers, ultimately increasing the volume and impact of submissions to the consultation. Below are some of the key notes and recommendations put forward by attendees to the call but are not representative of everyone's views. We have also noted the question(s) that the points relate to in the consultation survey, e.g. ***(Question 1).***

Watch the recording of the online discussion. A special thanks to Professor Seirian Sumner, Matt Town, Jennifer Brandsberg-Engelmann, Simon Lightman, Mary Colwell and our very own Freddie Emms for their contributions.

KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fieldwork ***(Questions 13-14)***

- The fieldwork aspect is mostly good, covers a good range of topics and is flexible. However, the 20 hours proposed is insufficient, particularly in comparison to current GCSE subjects like P.E. which has more dedicated practical time.
- Fieldwork should not be isolated episodes - one-off trips that are forgotten about but should form an integral part of an ongoing regular connection to nature. There could also be space for longitudinal projects which involve different groups of students over several years.
- Students should have a nature / field journal which could be used as a form of assessment.

Assessment and use of statistics

- There is a high level of content on statistics which indicates how students would be tested and graded on the GCSE. This is concerning as the GCSE will more likely lend itself to students who have done well so far in biology and maths, and deter

other students. Instead, there is a need for a more qualitative focus within the GCSE when social scientists are essential in the ecology and environment sector. ***(Question 15)***

Inclusion and equity

- The equality impact assessment currently only states barriers for disabled students, overlooking the specific challenges faced by learners with other protected characteristics, particularly during fieldwork. This narrow view ignores practical realities such as the facilities available for menstruating students, spaces and timing for religious observance, and socioeconomic constraints that limit access to outdoor activities. ***(Questions 20-21)***
- Under the content for 'habitats and wildlife in the UK', it is stated that students should have an understanding of how habitats are formed, its distinct vegetation and dependent animal life. However, it is stated that Farmland and Urban group settings are excluded from this understanding. If students are not learning about them but some live, learn and are expected to carry out fieldwork in them, it poses an issue by communicating that these are less valid eco-systems. (***Question 16)***
- Inequality plays a huge role in access to nature.

Social Studies, nature connection and human-nature dualism *(Question 19)*

- The GCSE poses dated teaching that humans and nature are separate, and the economic forces driving habitat loss are absent. Therefore, there must be greater inclusion of teaching on human interactions with nature and the natural world.
- Humans should be named as a part of the species groupings, dependent on habitats for food, water, air and a stable climate.
- Capitalism and colonisation should be taught within the subject, and the anthropocene named. Ireland's new Climate Action and Sustainable Development course is an example of the inclusion of teaching on these topics.
- There should be inclusion of socio-economic impacts of climate change and the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge systems. These approaches replace exploitative narratives of ownership and human exploitation of the land and nature, instead fostering a sense of reciprocity with the natural world.
- There is no mention of nature connection in the draft content but there should be capacity to foster wonder, awe and emotional appreciation, as well as scientific understanding of ecological processes.

Integration of education on climate change and sustainability *(Question 22)*

- The GCSE is framed as a progression from KS3 to prepare for further study, training or employment - it is therefore not aimed to be for all students and does not align with the Government commitment that every child and young person has regular, meaningful opportunities to learn in, through, about and for nature throughout their education. Education on climate change and sustainability needs to be integrated across all subjects, as the optional Natural History GCSE will not provide the opportunity for all students to access climate and nature education.
- The GCSE should include teaching on tackling the Shifting Baseline Syndrome to help provide a vision on what has been lost, and how what has happened so quickly can be reversed.

Interdisciplinary links, systems-level thinking and teacher training *(Question 19)*

- To gain a more holistic understanding of nature and our place within it, there is the opportunity to include more interdisciplinary links, e.g. psychology, arts, health.
- Concerns about which teachers will teach natural history and the training available for those teachers. However, if teachers from other subjects are trained to teach it could help with the wider remit of natural history and interdisciplinary learning, helping to encourage more students to take the GCSE.
- We want to see systems-level thinking, where we consider not only individual actors within ecosystems and the effects that they might have, but also the impacts of systemic threats to the natural world at a much wider level.

NEXT STEPS

- Submit your response by the **4th September 2026**
- Share additional notes or insights with us (hello@teachthefuture.uk) and we can help circulate with those who registered for the call and we'll keep this document updated.
- Keep an eye out for the upcoming consultation from Ofqual about the assessment of the GCSE.