Good afternoon, ministers, delegates, organisers, young people.

I am delighted to be here representing the Mock COP26 youth delegation as part of this crucial conversation. Thank you to the UK Department for Education, UNESCO and Italian government for ensuring youth are an equal partner in this event.

When COP26 was postponed last year, we ran an alternative, Mock COP26. In just three months we brought together 330 young people from over 140 countries to run our own version of COP26. We produced a global declaration with 18 ambitious yet realistic policies covering six important themes, including climate education.

We are so pleased to have been able to co-create the programme for this summit, ensuring that youth voice is central to the urgent work of re-purposing education in the fight against climate change. We hope our work here provides an inspiring model for how national governments, policy makers and educationalists should work with young people, as equals, to progress climate education.

It is wonderful to see your pledges, representing a breadth of nations, and we thank you for them. It is admittedly disappointing more countries haven’t made them, especially as we have young people with us in the room today whose ministries aren’t represented. We hope you will work with us to improve this for COP27.

We think that only teaching about climate change in geography and science sends a dangerous message to young people, that the climate emergency is just something that scientists and geographers have worry about. Every one of my classmates will have to deal with the effects of the climate crisis, and every one of them needs to be a part of the solution. Our vision for climate education is to see climate woven through all learning like a golden thread. We want to see bold policy commitments that will ensure climate learning is integrated, mandatory and assessed, spanning all levels and areas of education.

Over the last year our Mock COP delegates have been working on this with education ministers in many countries, including the UK. I’d like to personally thank the Secretary of State for his important announcement earlier today, putting climate at the heart of the education system in this country.

We all know that education plays a catalytic role in shaping society, from individual behaviours to systemic change. To safeguard our planet, we urgently need education systems all around the world to be harnessed for positive change. This week at COP, world leader after world leader has said we need a seismic shift in society if we are to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Education is exactly how we will achieve this shift. As Nelson Mandela said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

Climate education must empower citizens to believe they can be part of positive change. However, because of how we teach the climate crisis, only a minority of students feel empowered to take action

Ministers, we appeal to you to do three things for us, your young people:

Number one. Invest in your teachers so they can deliver high-quality, integrated climate education.

We know that many teachers want to integrate climate into their subjects but they just don’t have the confidence to do it. Yesterday I helped deliver a Teach the Teacher training session – something we have run in over 20 countries. That’s good as a stop-gap measure, but it should be governments that reskill teachers, not students. We are
delighted to see many of your pledges committing to new teacher training, but this must be shaped with educators, and teachers should not have to do it in their spare time. It has to be properly funded.

Number two. Don’t develop climate education for young people, instead do it with and through them.

Reach out to young people and youth climate activists in your own countries. It is our generation that have to live with the impacts of the climate crisis, so please make sure we are part of these conversations and decision-making processes. It is our education and it is our future, we need, and want, to help shape it.

Number three. Integrate climate education across the curriculum.

We need the whole of society to be part of the transition if we are to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees. Every student should be a sustainability student, as every career will be impacted by the climate emergency, and every job has the potential to be a part of the solution. Please don’t silo learning about climate into a few subjects – it must be fully integrated into every subject, much as the way equality is.

Young people are scared. Young people are seeing headlines in the news that are terrifying and makes them feel powerless - our education needs to give us the skills, the knowledge, the coping mechanisms, to turn those feelings into agency and action.

Young people are the future, and we need to be treated like we are.

Thank you, ministers.