

## (5) ACTION on Consumption



Saving Creation  
Diocese of Leeds

Schools cannot avoid being consumers of resources. Taking time to rethink and renew your attitude to this, however, can make a massive difference to your overall impact on the environment. Often the benefits are the result of many small incremental changes, but together they can add up to significant action.

This Action Sheet will be a little different than previous ones. Up to this point, we have been suggesting actions that can be taken in each target area. This Action Sheet will highlight a range of ways the school's attitude to consumption can be altered, suggesting some practical examples for each. It will be up to each school to apply these principles to their specific situation and so what this might actually look like in each school may well be very different.

### From LINEAR to CIRCULAR

For many years, in all spheres of activity, the economies of the developed world have been largely linear ones. In this model, natural raw materials are gathered and transformed into products. These products are then purchased and used by consumers. When the products have fulfilled their use, they are discarded as waste. To replace them the whole linear process starts again.



A circular economy is built on the principle of getting much greater use out of those initial natural raw materials. In its simplest form, it is encapsulated by the now popular campaign phrase 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'. This calls for consumers to reduce their use of resources and products as much as possible, reuse products in as many ways of possible to extend their lifespan and then return their constituent raw materials in the system through recycling.



While 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' is a useful catchy phrase, the possibilities for action within a circular economy are more varied than these. We will consider a range of ways the circular economy can influence our attitudes and consumption, each one starting with 're-'. It could be described as our **REconomy for Schools**.

### The 'RE-CONOMY' for Schools

There are many 're' words that contribute to our understanding of this transformed approach to consumption. We need to **rethink** our attitude and **resolve** to make changes. We might need to **redesign** and **reform** some of our practices, maybe even **regulating** to secure change. This might even mean **relinquishing** some things that we have done in the past. We will **reduce** our consumption where we can. This will mean buying less, but also **reusing**, **repairing** and **repurposing**. We could even **rent** or **share** (!) some occasional items with other schools / organisations. And when we have maximised the use we can have out of something, we can **recycle** it effectively. We will seek to **re-educate** adults and pupils to embed this approach. This might also include **reactivating** skills that could help and making pupils **ready** for the green jobs of the future. Ultimately, the **results** will be **respect** and **recovery**, leading to an enhanced **reputation** for the school. As Church of England schools we are participating in Christ's **reconciliation**, **restoration** and **renewal** of his creation – the natural world and its resources.

## **RETHINK & RESOLVE**

The first step must come from leadership, but can be driven by the passion of pupils for taking action to save the planet. As school leaders, being prepared to rethink the school's attitude to consumption and resolving to take the necessary action to make a difference is a precursor to making change.

**EXAMPLE** - *If you need some practical suggestions for this, go back to **Action Sheet 1 – Getting Started**.*

**EXAMPLE** - *You might even want to take another look at the **collective worship resources** to reinforce the need for change in your own minds and those of the school community.*

A key element is to include consideration of the environmental impact in every decision about purchasing or discarding resources. This direction must come from the top as, at times, it will involve more financial cost. However, if the 'cost' to the environment (even when this is not directly calculable) is factored in to considerations, this will often change the outcome of the decision making process. This is especially true if the different approaches below are included as options where possible. Importantly, when schools, MATs, federations and other school grouping begin to overtly make issues such as the carbon footprint and environmental sustainability a criteria in their decisions of the products they purchase, pressure will begin to build on suppliers and producers to take action to improve in these areas.

## **REDESIGN, REFORM & RELINQUISH**

When thinking specifically about consumption, simple policy changes can lead to big impacts. How can you do things differently? With a little creative thought across the school community, a whole host of initiatives could be identified and tried. Widening the range of people contributing to this process of rethinking may not only throw up more new possibilities, but will also ensure that the whole community are engaged in implementing the approaches identified. The more you can do the better.

**EXAMPLE** – *Pupils keep their subject exercise books from year to year. How much paper is wasted by always starting the new school year with new exercise books? Would changing this be detrimental in any way to pupil learning? It might even help you track pupil progress.*

This might mean taking some tough decisions. Are there things that you do whose environmental costs outweigh the educational benefit they bring? Could they be done differently to reduce that impact?

**EXAMPLE** – *Could you relinquish particular school trips and instead provide that content differently? Many educational organisations will bring the content into school instead rather than taking all the pupils out. (See **Action Sheet 3 - Action on Transport**)*

## **REGULATE**

Regulating can carry some unhelpful connotations. Some people might imagine lots of pedantic rules to catch them out. However, regulation is there to help everyone implement new initiatives. How can people know what the best way to behave is unless they are clearly told? How can we estimate the impact of changes unless we know that they have been implemented as we imagined? Regulations can set out clearly the new actions required in by a new initiative, helping everyone to make the change in behaviour.

**EXAMPLE** – A new regulation that lights should be switched off when a room is empty can help get everyone on board with the change. It can encourage everyone, including pupils, to police themselves and each other.

Hints about regulations:

- Keep new regulations specific to the initiative introduced.
- Keep regulations as simple as possible.
- Introduce regulations in stages – wait until the first behaviours are embedded and so no longer need regulating before introducing the next regulations.

## **REDUCE**

This step is key in the **RE**economy, and has the benefits that it can save you money. Where is your school being wasteful? Where can you use less of something to save resources and money?

**EXAMPLE** – Reduce use of paper by insisting on double sided printing where possible.

**EXAMPLE** – Reduce use of paper by reducing the use of photocopied worksheets.

**EXAMPLE** – Choosing a supplier that uses reduced packaging.

**EXAMPLE** – Expect backing paper on displays to be left up for longer, not changed each time a display might change.

In some situations this will involve a value judgement - Will using less impact on the outcomes achieved? In many cases, however, an attitude of reducing waste and using less can be implemented with no negative impacts and only positive ones.

Once you begin to see situations where this can be achieved, the 'reduce' mind-set becomes embedded and you will see opportunities to reduce all over the place!

## **REUSE, REPAIR & REPURPOSE**

Another way to reduce our overall consumption of resources is to get the most use out of what we have. This can take different forms, including creating reusable resources, repairing where possible, not just buying new, and repurposing things that are no longer needing for one use to be used in different ways.

**EXAMPLE** – Commonly used practice sheets in Maths or other subjects could be laminated and used with white board markers. These could replace printed worksheets and could be reused many times over.

**EXAMPLE** – When replacing IT equipment, re-conditioned equipment could be purchased instead of brand new. This extends the life of the equipment and will also save you money as reconditioned equipment is usually cheaper.

**EXAMPLE** – Create systems where old school uniform can be donated and passed on to new users through a second hand uniform sale or offer. Enabling school uniform to be passed on in this way can not only extend its useful life considerably but can also support the families financially and foster a greater sense of togetherness within your school community.

**EXAMPLE** – When purchasing paper or other material, options using recycled materials could be chosen.

**EXAMPLE** – Old textbooks, which are no longer needed by you, could be useful to someone else. Books2Africa (<https://books2africa.org/>) are one charity that aim to promote recycling and raise the quality of education in Africa. They don't just take text books either, but any sort of books, other educational resources and computers.

**EXAMPLE** – When you are replacing classroom furniture, what other uses can the old furniture be put to? You might be able to sell it or donate it to another school. You might be able to use them in an outdoor learning area or to create new display areas. You could repurpose the tables to make dens or an aeroplane or a train carriage in your EYFS outdoor space.

## **RENT & SHARE**

Renting or leasing items can be an environmentally friendly approach to ownership.

**EXAMPLE** – Often IT equipment can be leased for an extended period of time and then returned at the end of the lease. This used equipment is often reconditioned and resold, reducing its environmental impact.

There are also times when you might be able to share items. If you need an unusual item in school for some specific reason, is your first reaction to go online shopping or do you call around other local schools to see if they have one lying around not being used? This could be one off sharing, such as borrowing PA equipment or stage lighting. It could, however, also be a longer term arrangement, such as an agreement to share a school minibus.

## **RECYCLE**

Recycling is often the first thing we think about when considering environmental action. However, as we have seen, recycling is what happens at the end of a long list of other things we can and should be doing. Even so, recycling is still a very important element in the working of our REconomy. It is the way in which we ensure that natural resources are used and reused as much as they can be rather than simply being discarded in landfill.

When thinking about effective systems for recycling in school, there are several questions that should be asked:

- **Are we recycling all we could?**

Many schools, often at the prompting of pupils, have introduced systems for recycling paper. Everyone knows, however, from household recycling that many more types of materials can be recycled. Do you have systems for recycling plastics, aluminium cans, glass and other materials in school? And if not, how would you do this? Schools can also centres for specialist recycling, such as for batteries (<https://www.recycle-more.co.uk/recycling/batteries>). And don't forget the important recycling of electrical and IT equipment.

- **Are our systems working?**

It does not do any good when, despite paper for recycling is being put in a separate classroom bin, at the end of the day your cleaning contractors just empty it all into the same general rubbish.

- **What does your waste management provider do with your recycled materials?**

It is always worthwhile having a conversation with your waste management contractor about recycling. Knowing that your recycled material is actually being sent for recycling makes the effort worthwhile. Often waste management companies can also give you tips and assistance in how to improve your recycling. And, if your waste management contractor can't meet your recycling needs, then there are other providers out there who will.

There are now plenty of places to look for good advice on recycling. For example, [www.recycle-more.co.uk](http://www.recycle-more.co.uk) and [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com) are websites that can support recycling.

## **RE-EDUCATE & REACTIVATE**

One of the most significant long-term impacts we can have for sustainability is the education we give to our pupils. If the curriculum we provide is rich in environmental and sustainability issues, then our pupils will grow up well educated and able to change their consumption and behaviour habits. In the DfE policy paper 'Sustainability & Climate Change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems', great importance is placed on the power of increasing pupils understanding of the environment, climate change and what can be done to prevent it.

**EXAMPLE** – *Many schools have identified 'Curriculum Drivers' that underpin their curriculum across the whole range of subjects. Environmentalism and Sustainability can work really well in this role. Many pupils are passionate about their concern for the planet and climate change. Connecting to this passion across the curriculum can have a very positive impact. It is not just the obvious connections through Science and Geography that can be developed. For example, in History, pupils can study the environmental impact of industrialisations or inventions that are key to our modern world; in RE, pupils can delve into the theological and ethical issues linked to climate change; or in Art, pupils can create art work expressing their feelings about the natural environment, maybe even using natural materials etc.*

It is not only pupils, however, that will be educated through a school's focus on the environment and climate change. Adults, both within the school and within the wider community, can be impacted by the messages they hear and the action the school takes. This could lead some to re-evaluating their own behaviours with regards consumption and in other areas.

As part of using education to bring about change, schools can seek to re-activate skills that in the past might have been important but have more recently fallen away. Additionally, many of these abilities also equip pupils with lifelong cost saving and health enhancing skills.

**EXAMPLE** – *Giving pupils the skill to sew and, specifically, to mend or alter clothes can increase the life of individual items of clothes.*

**EXAMPLE** – *Teaching pupils how to cook for raw ingredients can reduce food and packing waste.*

**EXAMPLE** – *Teaching pupils to ride a bike can enable them to choose transport options other than a car.*

Another element of the government's strategy is around preparing pupils for the world of work in an era when the impacts of climate change are being felt. This is not only about giving pupils the skills they need to proceed into the obvious 'green' industries. Many, if not most, industries and jobs will, in some way, be impacted by climate change. Our pupils of today will need the resilience and adaptability that will be required of them in the future.

## **RESULTS & REPUTATION**

Adopting an approach to consumption that is based on the circular economy, or **REconomy** as we have expressed it, can have wide reaching implications for our practice. It can involve major policy initiatives, but will also be comprised of many small steps, decisions and changes of behaviour. This wholesale approach will work best in schools that adopt sustainability and environmentalism as key elements to their vision, identity and purpose. The result of doing so will not only be its positive impact on environment. It also can galvanise the whole school community in a common purpose and create an identity for the school that makes it stand out. This can bring reputational benefits that will be positive for the school long term.