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Does Policy Measure Up?

An assessment of England's national climate adaptation policies

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Overview

Climate change and the subsequent need for adaptation is not a new trend, but we are now seeing ever increasing and extreme climate impacts (Fig. 1). England has been supporting climate adaptation since the early 1990's, however, in recent years there has been a significant backwards step in the planning and implementation of adaptation action. The support of national government and the level of national policy ambition can be an instrumental factor in how successful climate adaptation is. The EPA-funded Transboundary Adaptation Learning Exchange (TALX) project team assessed national climate adaptation policy and highlighted areas where England is failing to meet its policy ambitions, and where it must improve.

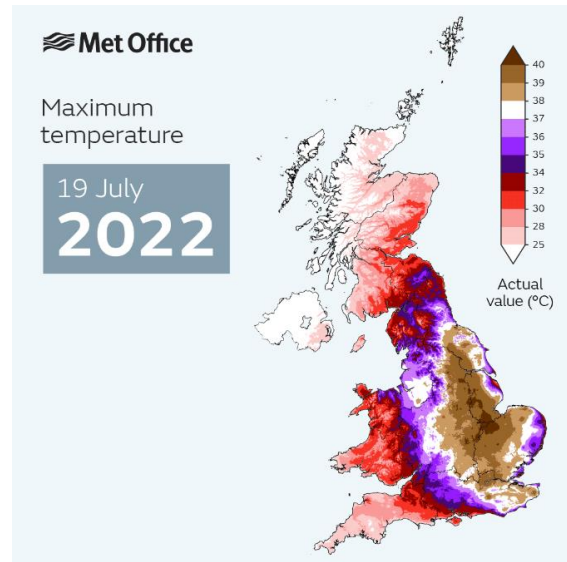


Figure 1: Record breaking temperatures recorded in England (Met Office Report, 2022)

Key Messages

The TALX project research has identified five key principles which are central to the development of good quality adaptation policy. Despite making progress in certain aspects, England is not fully addressing any of these principles in current policy ambitions. Across all areas, policy has either failed to acknowledge essential criteria for adaptation or has not provided resource for implementation. Important messages in the English context, for each theme, are highlighted below:

- 1. Stakeholder engagement:** Representative stakeholder engagement is essential for successful adaptation, in particular for gaining local support for implementation. This is currently lacking, with no dedicated processes in place to enable the range of stakeholder engagement required.
- 2. Policy and Governance:** While there are national climate adaptation policies, underpinned by legislation, in place, England's world leader status in driving climate adaptation is long gone. An erosion of resource has led to a collapse in the coordination of governance structures and a rise in siloed working. This has a knock on effect on how climate impacts are impacting the most vulnerable in society, with little to no support in disadvantaged areas, causing widening levels of injustice and inequity.
- 3. Resource:** Resources are key to building capacity and implementing adaptation action across all sectors and at all levels, and while there is some support for advances in scientific research to obtain information, the scale of staff and financing necessary for successful adaptation has not even been acknowledged in policy. Increased understanding and support from central government regarding the need for significant

changes in financial investment, skills development and communication, is essential to reduce the current adaptation gap.

4. **Decision-making:** Without good decision-making adaptation is doomed to failure. An increase in government support at all levels is necessary to ensure stakeholders have the capacity to select, assess and prioritise adaptation options using a just and equitable approach. Decision-making without these crucial elements can lead to both maladaptation¹ and increasing inequity.
5. **Mainstreaming:** While the need to include adaptation in decision-making across all sectors is highlighted specifically in adaptation policy, it is not acknowledged in key policies for growth and development, indicating a lack of foresight and drive for adaptation at a national level. Without a long-term plan and adequate resources to extensively integrate adaptation actions into everyday working, the current piecemeal approach to adaptation will persist, and climate impacts will continue to worsen.

Overall, there is substantial under resourcing for adaptation at all levels and a lack of support from central government to allow for English policy goals to be recognised. Addressing areas where the TALX team have highlighted gaps, and providing the necessary resources to combat these is a critical next step for policy-makers.

Recommendations

To achieve successful and effective climate adaptation, we recommend policy-makers and practitioners should:

1. **Establish local and national opportunities for dialogue** with a diverse range of stakeholders, where feedback is meaningfully integrated into subsequent adaptation policies and actions, to affect real change.
2. **Incentivise place-based adaptation partnerships²** to move away from siloed working and improve cross-sector and multi-level co-ordination and collaboration. Place-based adaptation partnerships such as the London Climate Change Partnership, are excellent tools that can bring stakeholders together to address common risks and opportunities in their locality. By advertising and funding locally-led initiatives, the government can support capacity building and encourage local ownership of adaptation actions.
3. **Strengthen long-term adaptation funding** to establish sustainable initiatives that have continuous support. Policy-making can support a pipeline of adaptation projects that move beyond political cycles and have social and economic co-benefits, transforming communities across England.
4. **Embed transparent monitoring, evaluation and learning in all adaptation activities.** Mandate reporting across all sectors and local authorities on regular cycles so that stakeholders can map their progress. Promote and reward innovative solutions that have adaptation and mitigation co-benefits.
5. **Map climate impacts** alongside existing regional socio-economic data (e.g. health, income, education, housing, etc.) to see where the highest vulnerabilities lie. Use these maps to aid decision-making and prioritise solutions that increases resilience amongst the most vulnerable.

More information on how the TALX team arrived at these conclusions and how they were validated by an expert panel of practitioners and policy-makers, using the Delphi approach, is available on the [TALX website](#).

¹ *Maladaptation – when climate adaptation actions have unintended negative consequences*

² *Place-based Adaptation Partnerships - formed from cross-sectoral and multi-level collaborations to support adaptation in a particular area*

Table 1: The criteria used to assess national climate adaptation policy (Blue: Acknowledged in policy with resources provided, Amber: Acknowledged in policy without resources provided, Red: Not acknowledged in policy)

Factor	Sub-factor	Code	Criteria	Rating
Stakeholder Engagement	Stakeholder Engagement	S1	Representative stakeholder involvement throughout the entire climate adaptation process, from the creation of adaptation policy to the implementation and evaluation of adaptation plans	Amber
		S2	A dedicated process in place to facilitate inclusive stakeholder involvement in the preparation of adaptation policies	Amber
Policy and Governance	National Policy	P1	A central administration body officially in charge of adaptation policy making	Amber
		P2	A national climate adaptation policy	Blue
		P3	Country level legislation in place to underpin adaptation policy (including frameworks and strategies etc.)	Blue
		P4	Independent monitoring and evaluation of national policy	Blue
	Leadership & Co-ordination of Roles and Responsibilities	P5	Horizontal (cross-sectoral) coordination mechanisms exist within the governance system, with division of responsibilities and SMART objectives and the alignment of policies	Amber
		P6	Vertical (multi-level) coordination mechanisms exist within the governance system, enabling all levels of administration from local to national to influence policy making	Amber
		P7	Creation of spaces for leaders of climate adaptation to emerge across scales	Amber
		P8	Climate adaptation is scalable, able to be tailored to different levels	Amber
		P9	Transparent climate finance with regards to adaptation initiatives	Amber
		P10	Transboundary cooperation (either existing or planned) to work together to address common challenges with other countries	Blue
	Climate Justice and Equity	P11	Domestic justice and equity issues (economic, social, environmental and cultural), relevant to each country, are recognised in national-level climate change policy and implementation (e.g. through decision-making)	Amber
		P12	Processes are in place to allow actions to reduce any identified differences and/or ensure the benefits of interventions accrue to the most vulnerable	Amber
		P13	Climate adaptation policy development, implementation and review is fully transparent	Blue
Resource	Staff and Financing	R1	Appropriate financing (enough to cover the cost of policy actions) is being applied to climate adaptation to achieve policy goals at all levels of governance	Red
		R2	Accessible long-term and self-sustaining resources are available to support policy goals at increasing climate resilience (i.e. funding, infrastructure, human resources)	Amber
	Capacity Building and understanding the capability of decision-makers and action takers	R3	Policy supports education, empowerment and engagement of stakeholders at all levels of decision making and action taking in relation to adaptation	Amber
		R4	Mechanisms exist to recruit and train practitioners with the specific skills required to undertake complex climate adaptation	Amber
	Information and Data	R5	The policy supports advances in scientific research to improve understanding and inform decision-making	Blue
		R6	Guidance for how to employ climate adaptation information is provided at sub-national levels	Amber
	Communication and Guidance	R7	Communication and engagement strategies included within the policy that utilize multiple platforms in order to reach diverse stakeholders	Amber
		R8	Recognition within the policy that climate change is an international issue and that adaptation strategies must look beyond national boundaries (i.e. the policy ensures the international aspect of adaptation is considered at decision-making levels)	Amber
		R9	Learning and support networks are available to enable all decision makers in producing and implementing appropriate climate adaptation policies	Amber
Decision-making	Decision-making	D1	Priority adaptation options are identified, prioritised and selected based on robust, equitable and transparent methods (e.g. using decision support tools)	Amber
		D2	An evaluation process is in place to assess the effectiveness of actions taken across all aspects of climate adaptation (i.e. from stakeholder engagement to mainstreaming)	Amber
		D3	The policy recognises that adaptation is an iterative and flexible process that accounts for new information/ experience	Amber
Mainstreaming	Mainstreaming	M1	Consideration of climate change adaptation been included in the national frameworks for environmental impact assessments and DRR's	Amber
		M2	Key policies recognise the need for adaptation action in future growth and development as a result of the impacts of climate change	Red
		M3	National policy instruments promote adaptation at sectoral level, in line with national priorities	Amber
		M4	Adaptation is mainstreamed in insurance or alternative policy instruments to provide incentives for investments in risk prevention	Amber
		M5	Climate mitigation and adaptation are being investigated in tandem	Amber
		M6	Adaptation actions are sustainable (i.e. meet environmental, societal and cultural needs) for their intended lifetime	Amber

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