

# REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE POLICY

2020



British Youth Council

**YOUTH**  
**STEERING** / **GROUP**

# CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Key Recommendations</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Climate</b> .....	<b>6</b>
3.1 Overview .....	6
3.2 Costs of Change .....	7
3.3 Climate Knowledge .....	8
3.4 Climate Engagement .....	10
<b>4. Waste and Recycling</b> .....	<b>12</b>
4.1 Overview .....	12
4.2 Creating Behaviour Change.....	13
4.3 Helping Consumers Make Sustainable Choices.....	14
4.4 Resources Engagement .....	15
<b>5. Protecting and Recovering Nature</b> .....	<b>17</b>
5.1 Overview .....	17
5.2 Campaign Strategy.....	18
5.3 Utilising Green Spaces .....	19
5.4 Communication Strategy .....	20
<b>6. Youth Engagement</b> .....	<b>22</b>
6.1 Overview .....	22
6.2 Youth Engagement Methods .....	22
6.3 Youth Engagement Within Policy Consultations .....	24
<b>7. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>26</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Youth Steering Group (YSG) was set up by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and convened by the British Youth Council, to enable young people to have a say in policy making. As part of this, the YSG were asked to evaluate the measures taken by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to ensure that domestic and international commitments to improve the environmental protection provision are reached, in a way that both involves and benefits young people. In particular, it focuses on: reducing climate change and reaching net-zero emissions targets, improving waste and resources management, and protecting and enhancing UK biodiversity.

The ideas in this report reflect the views of the members of the YSG, a diverse range of young people from around the UK aged between 14 and 24; further survey would be required to represent the views of all young people in the UK. For the purposes of this report, when making reference to young people, the YSG are referring to those aged twenty-five and under.

It should be noted that the YSG, the authors of this report, are not climate scientists, and do not claim to be so. However, we have worked with Defra and BEIS, including during two separate one-day workshops and so have a strong awareness of the environmental challenges that Britain faces. We believe that this places us in a credible position to write such a report.

## 2. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the course of the review, the YSG have considered various areas and have formulated recommendations of actions that Government should prioritise within each of the three priority areas mentioned above. Some recurring themes have emerged across the areas and so have been identified as key recommendations, outlined below.

Regardless of the policy area being addressed, the YSG feel strongly that the clarity of the Government's expression is imperative, as is the language that the Government uses to convey their message. Should the Government produce campaigns and messaging which is clear and concise, the YSG group believe that it will be more impactful since it will be open and accessible for a young audience. Using digital tools and images can aid this clarity of expression by demonstrating to young people visually the impact of their actions, making the magnitude and importance of their decisions obviously apparent. An example of such a campaign could be the use of a map, with all areas at risk of natural disasters as a result of climate change highlighted. This clearly demonstrates to young people the impact of their actions, and leaves no room for doubt within their minds. By reducing the amount of subject-specific jargon and using positive expressions which empower young people to act, rather than scaring them into doing so, the YSG believe that the Government can engage with the nation's young people effectively. It is important to note that, while the language used should be accessible and relevant to young people, it should not be patronising.

Further, the YSG also believe that it is of paramount importance that the responsibility for protecting nature, combating climate change and improving efficiencies in waste and recycling is not a burden felt only by young people, but is instead a collective responsibility belonging to everybody within society. When young people are asked to behave in a certain manner, but see adults and large businesses behave in a contrary manner, they will feel demotivated and their actions, no matter how positive, can be seen to pale into insignificance. This is why it is imperative that the Government inspire a top-down change, with the largest organisations in British society leading the way. However, the YSG do accept the challenges associated with developing such a wide-scale change within society, and the place of individual action within it.

Finally, the YSG strongly believe that it would be highly beneficial for a network of climate champions / green ambassadors to be developed from across the country. This group would act with a dual purpose, acting as a critical friend to the Government while also promoting government messages, events and campaigns within their local communities. This would be highly beneficial as it would assist the Government in developing a youth-centered approach to their campaign planning and marketing. Such a group could be kept informed of developments via a monthly newsletter, informing them of upcoming campaigns that the Government would like them to

promote among their peers. Holding an annual face-to-face meeting would also be an excellent opportunity to develop the skills of these young people so that they are as effective as possible.

**In summary, the YSG recommend that the next steps taken by the government should be:**

- **Developing a coherent youth engagement strategy, designed in collaboration with a diverse range of young people and organisations who are experienced in youth engagement. Examples of such organisations could include The British Youth Council, The Mix, and regional Youth Work Units from across the UK.**
- **Ensuring that all communications to young people are clear, concise and of an appropriate one;**
- **Ensuring young people are empowered to participate in environmental action without feeling as though it is their responsibility entirely;**
- **Exploring the feasibility of developing a network of climate champions who can become strong environmental advocates within their own communities.**

# 3. CLIMATE

## 3.1 Overview

From what the YSG have read and heard over the course of their review, they have outlined the main issues which Government, business and individuals should be focusing on to meet net-zero targets below:

It is thought that there is a lack of clear information on which decisions would be best for the environment and climate. For example, there are hidden environmental 'costs' to products and behaviours that are not advertised. Some advice has also been found to be poorly promoted, inaccessible or redundant. This may mean that consumers are unaware that the easy option, the path of least resistance that most are bound to follow, is not always environmentally friendly. Despite the push back against framing environmental protection in the terms of 'natural capital', it was also felt that moral incentives are not sufficient to allow young people facing economic barriers to make the changes which are crucial to the success of the environment plan by reducing their own climate impact. Due to this, the group believes that restructuring of retail priorities should be pushed for, and subsidies should be put in place to help to make the 'right' choice easier for people to make.

The YSG also felt that young people feel disenfranchised from making changes on an individual level without the support from larger businesses and organisations. It has been observed that 'token gestures' had been made, but that these have only served to illustrate that being environmentally friendly is not a priority compared to profit. If consumers are surrounded by establishments making the 'wrong' choice, it is very hard to justify to them why they should make the 'right' one. This is also the case when it comes to local and national government, as on the one hand, narratives coming from government over some behaviours such as fracking are conflicting with environmental advice, and in some places that members of the steering group have visited, local councils do not promote recycling within their own properties.

**Based on these beliefs and attitudes, the following suggestions were made:**

- **Centrally organised, consistent systems with clear information on what can and cannot be done**
- **NGOs and similar organisations who already have a large follower base of young people (WWF, National Trust, National Geographic) should foreground environmental messages, as well as promoting themselves as examples of good practice. It was thought that NGOs rather than ministers and government more broadly should undertake the role of informing; a balance needs to be found between offering the legitimacy embodied in government and the association sometimes held that messages are political.**
- **Government should aim to create a more socially and environmentally conscious society in the UK that works together to take responsibility in tackling issues.**

- **Shared costs and responsibility across consumers and manufacturers/businesses will help to increase efficiency and productivity in solving environmental issues.**

### **3.2 Costs of Change**

It was recognised that some actions that need to be taken will involve costs to both the consumer and decision-makers. The YSG suggested multiple ways in which these can be spread in the fairest way in order to be most effective and efficient.

The YSG argued that economic factors drastically impact young people as they make decisions which may have an impact on climate change. In particular, food shopping on a student budget was discussed as a key limitation to buying products which are clearly advertised as ‘environmentally friendly’. The plentiful availability of cheap meat, the production of which inhibits the target to reach zero emissions, often leads students to choose meat over vegetarian alternatives. Advertising of food products was also felt to be significant; vegan or vegetarian options are often marketed to appear more expensive than traditional meat options. In restaurants, where vegetarian options are often significantly cheaper, the variety is often limited, which decreases the probability that those who do not follow a plant-based diet would choose to purchase such a meal.

Other examples of financial questions included travel provision. Young people felt that visiting family and friends constitute an important part of life and contribute to positive mental health and wellbeing. The relative ease, speed, and lower cost of flying, compared to train transport may explain why it is very popular, even for short domestic journeys.

In addition, the lack of reliable public transport in rural areas also means that many young people prioritise low economic cost over environmental cost and the impact on climate change when choosing means of travel, while for others the use of public transport may simply not be a practical option.

Furthermore, students and young people living independently might have their agency limited by economic factors, but do have a relatively large amount of control over their choices. However, the majority of young people live with parents and carers, therefore having a limited ability to make decisions relating to actions within their daily lives that affect climate change, such as food, transport, waste management or significant purchases. Due to this, the YSG believes that young people should be empowered to have conversations around these topics with their parents and carers, and that these people should also be given education and information on how to reduce their families, and their own, impacts on climate.

**Based on these economic factors, the following suggestions were made:**

- **Cross-department collaboration to ensure that environmental education is made a priority with the Department for Education as part of a curriculum for life, environmentally friendly transport options are looked into with Department for Transport.**

- Increase subsidised and reliable public transport which is significant enough to undermine the cost of cheap flights, such as a railcard which allows a discount for taking the better option for the environment.
- Lobby for positive financial incentives from businesses, for example, coffee shops which allow a discount for a keep cup, or discounted meals which use sustainably sourced food.
- Lobby for advertisements from food chains which promote vegetarian and vegan food as cheaper; considering the environment as an economic, as well as a moral, concern.
- Removing the option in some instances to choose a non-environmentally friendly choice, for example, meat-free days at restaurants, workplaces or schools and government buildings.
- Messages that are framed in terms of positive steps rather than critical, negative narratives.
- Include adults and families in messaging aimed at young people's impacts, as they are able to have influence over young people's actions.

### 3.3 Climate Knowledge

When reflecting on whether the majority of young people knew enough about climate change and what can be done to tackle it and cope with its effects, the YSG posed the issues related to attitudes surrounding young people.

The Youth Steering Group argued that the narrative relating to engaging young people in acting against climate change needs to be reframed. It needs to go from one which posits the young person as uninformed, to one which recognises the young person as informed and engaged in acting against climate change. It was recognised that members' of the youth steering group might have a level of awareness that is not representative of all young people, but that a significant portion of other young people are not uninformed, but may be informed incorrectly due to the lack of accessible resources.

It was also argued that even if awareness still needs to be boosted, narratives which frame young people as both uninformed about, and simultaneously responsible for, climate change, are unhelpful. Instead, the narrative the Government projects relating to youth engagement with climate change needs to be sensitised to the specific barriers young people face when making micro-level decisions which have an impact on climate change. For example, this could be due to the fact that young people feel overwhelmed by a variety of other issues such as mental health, the gender pay gap and racial inequality. This can, therefore, make individual actions seem small and meaningless. In addition, the group was quite critical of that fact that it has fallen to young people to 'fix' these issues, as they should have already been dealt with by wider society.

In addition to the economic reasons which impact decision making, the YSG considered some of the existing attitudes and beliefs held by young people which might also be significant. One problem highlighted was the sense that climate change has become politicised due to the view that a particular political party is in control of promoting national environmental policies. The lack of political unity which exists in the UK currently is reflected in young people's views related to specific policies promoted by the Government; even if the reality is that such policies stem from collaboration with NGOs and think tanks, and that these make good, logical sense and will be beneficial, there is a distrust in whether the policy will be carried out.

Additionally, as an individual, the sense of having an impact can be very small, and it can be hard to know what exactly should be done and whether it makes any difference more broadly. This can, therefore, undermine individual actions as when other members of society are seen to not following the recommended actions. Government should work with businesses to mobilise them and encourage them to lead by example as it sets a precedent and shows that there is going to be an impact when individuals follow suit. It is also worth noting that at the outset a large business reducing its climate impact will have a larger effect than the acts of a small portion of individuals. For people who are living on a tight budget, the required changes are expensive and inconvenient, so if they feel they are carrying the burden of making those changes while those that can afford to make them and would have a bigger impact are not, there will be low motivation to act. This is not to say that individuals do not need to be accountable for reducing their emissions, as together they do make up a significant part, but they need sufficient advice and information from Government and businesses so that they can begin to take that responsibility seriously. There is a difference between knowing about an issue in a superficial sense, and actively trying to engage with campaigns, and this is a gap which needs closing.

**Based on these views, the following suggestions were made:**

- **Young people often feel alienated from policies developed by the Government, so there should be more meaningful engagement with young people so that they have more say in how they are developed to rectify this, for example through a national roundtable or other focus groups.**
- **During the policy-making stage for all legislation, the impact of the intended decisions on young people be considered.**
- **Government should be more transparent and show where certain decisions have come from, both online and through the media.**
- **Information about issues and decisions should be more accessible to those with non-specialist backgrounds, including young people.**
- **Government should recognise that the responsibility for dealing with climate change needs to be taken up by all, and that individual actions must be complemented by shifts in other sectors.**

### 3.4 Climate Engagement

The YSG believe that there are multiple ways to raise awareness across society about the challenge of climate change, the changes that it will mean, and the opportunities there might be as these changes are made, but that they range in efficacy. One of the main aspects that was considered was who should deliver these messages.

It was felt that language usually used by the government seems too critical or didactic, and can alienate young people. For most young people, information is reached online and through social media, but as there is such a diversity of sources, it can be very hard to reach the appropriate sources of information and to get through the 'noise' and misinformation.

It was observed that young people are really struggling generally to access reliable knowledge/ sources of information. Usual channels of finding information such as local news and television are not commonly used for this purpose, and social media is full of noise.

It would be useful to have a way to verify sources, however Government is not necessarily the best platform for this. There is a general lack of understanding about the Government and how it works among not only young people but society more broadly. This then means that it is not going to be the most trusted, or useable, source. The notable exception to this is the fact that local councillors and mayors are actually surprisingly effective at getting families and children to engage in some areas, as they bring legitimacy. The local connection to members of the public is stronger, and the political implication is less obvious.

Among young people, there is a higher amount of trust in people and organisations who are concentrated on particular issues, as it is obvious where they stand. In the context of climate, it is the belief of the YSG that an independent body would have more authority and garner more attention and trust. NGOs have a relatively legitimate voice and platform on social media, and are more likely to receive online traffic from young people than government pages.

In addition to independent authorities, the YSG praised the effectiveness of peer-to-peer campaigns. It was suggested that there could be teams of climate champions, as first mentioned in section two: key recommendations, who help drive local level options and commitments. These kinds of local campaigns work well, bringing in people from across society, but are most effective when legitimised, supported and funded by local Governments. In conjunction with this, there was the idea of bringing together passionate advocates, some of which would be young people, from across the country to help inform them and develop a broader national campaign with them that they then lead in their communities.

**To improve the engagement of young people, the following suggestions were made:**

- **Promote messages through Governmental partners, such as the Climate Coalition and other environmental bodies, not necessarily Government itself.**

- Ensure messaging is suitable for a range of levels of ability and interest, give the opportunity to read further into causes and effects.
- Consider setting up a network of climate champions, as outlined in section 2 (Key Recommendations).
- Ensure that messages are coherent, so that those that do engage have a clear view of what the expected next steps are.

# 4. WASTE AND RECYCLING

## 4.1 Overview

From the material reviewed during the report process, the YSG have come up with multiple ways in which they think that Government could improve the way they are currently tackling both food and plastic waste, helping the UK to become a more 'resource efficient' nation.

One way in which the YSG believe that the government can tackle and reduce the amount of plastic waste created in the UK is to focus primarily on the production stage of materials. By doing this, rather than promoting end-of-cycle action such as recycling, the amount of potential waste is reduced before it is marketed. One real outcome of the 25 Year Plan that the YSG believe has been advantageous is the reduction of raw materials being used, as if there is less plastic input into society, it should follow that less ends up as waste. If things do end up as waste, however, members of the YSG believe that waste is something that should be dealt with as internally as possible, as to not contribute to emissions used to transport waste overseas or to damage the environment of other countries.

The YSG also endorse extra funding being put into work on making more plastics more easily recyclable. One way of doing this is by focusing on showing the consumer what they can do with those plastics at the point of purchase, and also by trying to reduce the amount of products made with non-recyclable materials or ones that require to be recycled non- kerbside. This is because the effort needed to perform such actions as travelling to a specific place for rare recyclables often puts people, especially young people, off of doing the environmentally 'right' thing. Consistency of recycling schemes across the country was also brought up multiple times as a major issue, as it presents a barrier to an effective integrated system.

Another element brought up by members of the YSG was that there should be more focus on topics such as the development of sustainable waste technologies. Examples of these included biodegradable plastics and getting energy from residual waste. These will greatly help the UK's waste problem but are currently too expensive to be adopted universally. The only issue with these that was raised by the YSG was the potential to spread focus too thinly across multiple avenues of change, which may not be the most effective approach compared to investing concerted effort into one, very well run, scheme with more of an impact.

**Based on these observations, the YSG suggests:**

- **Reducing the output of plastics generally.**
- **Investing in better recycling provision.**
- **Exploring new waste management options.**

## 4.2 Creating Behaviour Change

The YSG believe that there are multiple ways in which Government can encourage people to increase the range and quantity of products that they reuse, recycle and repair.

One of the issues members of the YSG had with the idea of economic sanctions such as fines, bans, or charges on items to make them more environmentally friendly was that they need to have sufficient time and advertisement before taking place to ensure they work effectively. If there wasn't enough time given for people and businesses to prepare for or adapt to the change it would cause people to dislike it and try to find ways around it. However, things such as the sugar tax were given as an example of where similar schemes have worked to great effect, and it was then argued that introducing a plastic tax may make consumers think about the amount of plastic that they are buying and the other alternatives that are out there to make it more cost-friendly for them and environmentally-friendly on the whole. There would be many options with regards to how such a tax would be implemented, with a tax on certain types of plastic use such as excessive packaging for items or single-use plastics a possibility that could be further explored. Before implementing such a tax, it would be essential that research and development of alternative products is conducted to allow suitable alternatives to the plastic products to emerge.

However, another way of incentivising good environmental practices discussed by the YSG was to create a reward scheme for people who are environmentally friendly. An example of a reward could be achieved if glass bottles, large plastic bags or crisp packets are returned to the retailer or manufacturer; consumers could then receive a discount or some kind of points. This would be aided by simplifying and standardising the UK recycling process.

For example, the colour of recycling bins across the country can be made consistent so when young people are moving away for university or going on holiday they know which is the recycling bin and which is the general waste. This, however, will only be beneficial when the public are educated on, and willing to follow, the correct recycling procedure.

One of the things the YSG believe creates a barrier to some young people participating in recycling schemes is the lack of knowledge about what happens to their products once they have been put in a recycling bin. In some places that members of the YSG knew of, especially schools, despite the effort that young people had gone to putting the correct objects in a recycling bin, the whole building's waste is currently taken out as business waste. This can cause young people to feel disenfranchised, and therefore less likely to engage with recycling schemes in the future due to a lack of trust.

When looking at Ecodesign and making things easier to repair or upgrade, the YSG believed that such advances will only make a difference when they are widely known about by consumers. Things that have been designed to last a long time, and be environmentally friendly, should be clearly labelled and advertised. Some items such as furniture, cars, shoes and clothes currently have elements of ecodesign, but this

is not well known, and the benefits of buying one over another is not clear. A scale, reflecting current ones used for the efficiency of lightbulbs and white goods, may be able to be implemented to make it easier for the consumer to see the impact of what they are purchasing. Promotion of the fact that goods are durable, and may save people money due to the fact that they are easily repairable at the point of damage, should be encouraged among retailers. By developing a rating system for products such as furniture, clothing and plastics, it would be immediately made clear to the consumer if the product is recyclable or if it is a 'fast-fashion' purchase which will likely contribute to landfill at the end of its life-cycle. The YSG were also very keen to promote services that could be rented or shared among multiple consumers to reduce waste. Some items that were suggested to be most suitable for renting or sharing were books, cleaning and gardening supplies, and clothes that are worn once for special occasions. There are currently some schemes that work on dealing with food waste, as in some areas extra food can be shared through neighbourhood schemes such as OLIO.

**As a result of an evaluation of these methods, the following suggestions were made:**

- **Create trust within young people that when they put items in the recycling bin they are actually being recycled. This could be done by creating a short video showing people where their recycling goes and what is done with it, including what happens to contaminated or unsuitable objects, to educate the public on how the system works.**
- **Help people to understand how waste links to other problems that harm the environment, but also how it impacts on individual finance.**
- **Develop a reliable certification or rating scheme that helps guide consumers to the most sustainable choice for a wider range of products.**

### **4.3 Helping Consumers Make Sustainable Choices**

The YSG considered the consumer experience and evaluated the number of things that they believe that people need to know when shopping to help them to produce less waste through making more sustainable choices.

There are numerous problems posed by food waste, which means that consumers will often have to make trade-offs. For example, some types of food will last longer in plastic packaging, which, if it prevents the food from going to waste, could be a better environmental choice. However, the public often find these trade-offs confusing, and this can cause them to feel disenfranchised. Due to this, the full impacts of any one action can be confusing to define, and to disentangle the effects of multiple actions that contradict one another is nearly impossible. Therefore, the YSG believe the public will need more support to make informed decisions.

Young people in particular can feel disenfranchised as they often don't have the agency to respond to advice they are given, due to the views and practices of their parents or

carers. Food especially is something that young people do not have control over, in respect to portion sizes and food sources. However, to combat this, the YSG believe that giving people a strong sense of efficacy is important to getting individuals to act – a sense of mass movement is needed, to make individuals feel that when they make an environmentally- friendly action or choice, they are a part of something larger that is making a real difference. A way of doing this is by having big organisations buying in and acting: leading by example.

To encourage consumers to make the choice to reduce their food waste at the point of purchase, a Red/Amber/Green sustainability rating system on products could be helpful and some people would be willing to pay more for products marked as being from a sustainable source, if the purpose of the label is very clear (for example, as with Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance certified foods). Another aspect related to this that was discussed was to show consumers how much money the average household loses each year by overbuying on food which does not get eaten. This would create a reward system within itself as, if people were more conscious of the savings they could be making by reducing their food waste, then they would have more money to reward themselves.

The YSG believe that many young people do not have sufficient skills and knowledge when it comes to cooking and planning their meals, which contributes vastly to the food waste they produce. It's a life skill that people have lost touch with, as food tech and hospitality are niche things on the curriculum. However, if there was a 'curriculum for life' system implemented in schools, it could help counter this. For instance, sixth form life skills courses could teach young people things like how to prepare a 30 minute meal, repair clothes and other sustainability skills.

**The main recommendations from the YSG to promote sustainable choices and produce less waste are:**

- **teaching sustainable skills to all young people**
- **inform the public of conflicts between different actions that involve waste and the environment.**

## **4.4 Resources Engagement**

Some of the sources of information that the YSG recommended as ones that young people would trust and listen to when it comes to encouraging them to change their behaviour around waste are discussed below.

There are many sources of information that young people would trust when it comes to encouraging people to change their behaviour.

**Some of these sources include role models and media personalities such as:**

- **David Attenborough**
- **Greta Thunberg**

- Celebrity Chefs, who could promote creative solutions to use leftovers
- YouTube influencers such as The Girl Gone Green, Sustainably Vegan and My Green Closet

Other sources of information can be trustworthy organisations or television programmes such as:

- BBC News
- Youth Groups
- Blue Planet

Finally, young people often also tend to be influenced by influential figures from within their local communities, such as:

- Youth groups
- Teachers
- Family
- Friends and Peer groups.

# 5. PROTECTING AND RECOVERING NATURE

## 5.1 Overview

The YSG recognise that wildlife can be helped by protecting special places like nature reserves and setting aside spaces for nature, or integrating more nature in and around the UK's diverse built environment. Elements considered to be important by the YSG within the new strategy for nature are outlined below.

Education is a key element in changing behaviour. Providing opportunities for young people in schools to enjoy the natural environment will make young people value the environment as it should be, and this would then encourage them to be advocates for nature when engaging with others. Ultimately, this would cause nature to be treated more respectfully not only by young people but by wider members of society too. A programme that aimed to enable school visits to take young people into nature would be a way in which this could be achieved, and would enable different learning styles to be experienced.

A second priority for the YSG was accountability. Organisations, including Government, should be held accountable if they do not comply with regulations or reach targets. The creation of the OEP will greatly aid this, providing it is run effectively and in conjunction with young people. Alongside this, there should be both clear and practical sanctions outlined and actioned, alongside rewards for good practice.

A change in the way funding is allocated was considered by the YSG, as it was believed that small community action projects can unite communities through social action. For instance, a youth club, a care home, or other community groups could be given the opportunity to create a small wildlife garden together. This would help to give nature a home within cities and other urban areas. This type of scheme would be beneficial to those involved as well as to the wider community, which would gain an environment that could be utilised and enjoyed.

**To ensure the new strategy works for young people, the following suggestions were made:**

- **Actions should be considered with respect to their impact on young people**
- **A spread of realistic goals that comes along with a clear system of accountability that can be implemented at review stages**

## 5.2 Campaign Strategy

When discussing Government's role in this, the YSG believed that it might be more beneficial for Government to co-ordinate, rather than openly run, campaigns.

Primarily, the ability and capacity of young people to reach out across society was seen as a way to avoid overt government intervention, with both peer-to-peer influence and getting young people to be the champions suggested as campaign structures. This could be through facilitating subject specialists to give training, resources and support to young people so that they drive events and information in their areas. It is also very important to get people to see that they are part of the solution and that they are able to make their impact visible.

The 'Year of Green Action' run by Government was seen to have some merits, as it has been implemented with input from #iwill ambassadors as part of their #iwill4nature scheme. However, it was not considered to be well advertised or implemented in some of the areas that the YSG represent. Those not already engaged with similar schemes tended not to have much knowledge of what was happening around the project, or how they could get involved. The YSG did approve of the messaging they had seen from the campaign, using the Year of Green Action logo in replacement of the Defra one.

The YSG believed that government's main role was in the provision of information to the public. It was noted that this information should be clear, accessible to a range of abilities and available in multiple formats on a range of platforms. Suggestions of what these could be included social media platforms, a version of gov.uk that was easier to navigate, and it was also noted that the YSG is also in the process of creating new youth voice vehicles for other projects which may be able to be utilised or adapted to enable this clearer sharing of information. However, the opportunity for more power to be given to local and parish councils was considered as a way to get the message out. This was due to the fact that people will usually have a better relationship with these institutions than with central Government. This is particularly true with young people in the present climate, who, in the experience of the YSG, may feel disheartened with the present political environment.

**In this area, the YSG's main recommendations to government are:**

- **Ensure messaging is clear and concise.**
- **Take recommendations from young people, subject specialists and other interested parties, in order to create a many-sided cohesive approach.**

## 5.3 Utilising Green Spaces

The YSG had a variety of ideas concerning the places in which the biodiversity could be improved.

The first area in which the YSG focussed on was individual private property. It was noted that one of the most noticeable reductions in urban green space was being caused by the front gardens of homes that are being paved over to allow for increased parking. It was therefore suggested that these places could be opened up with plants, grass or bushes to encourage wildlife, and to promote the benefits of keeping gardens 'green', in terms of both biodiversity and drainage.

Public and community spaces that were considered to have the potential for increasing biodiversity included firstly school and sports fields, as they are large green spaces that can often be left unused for large parts of the year. Religious sites also often have large gardens, which could be utilised with sensitivity to their cultural significance. Hedgerows and verges that commonly only contain grass or a single type of plant could also be 'upgraded' to provide a more varied habitat. A well-maintained children's playpark may also be able to provide a learning experience as well as a habitat, with the installation of a sensory walk or other similar attraction.

Commercial spaces that may be considered for improvement included new housing developments, as it is easier to alter a plan for a building to include environmentally friendly initiatives such as solar panels or green roofs than it is to install them on already existing structures. It was suggested that this could come under the 'biodiversity net gain' targets currently being rolled out to construction companies. Monoculture land farming was also seen as an issue, with suggestions to either co-plant multiple crops or to invest in hedgerows as wildlife corridors. The YSG believe that the benefits of doing this should be publicised more effectively to larger companies and farmers. Care farms were also mentioned as being very effective, as they encompass many things on one site, but they could perhaps be further integrated into the education system to ensure that young people are exposed to outdoor education and the kind of knowledge and skills that they need to help support their understanding of potential impacts on the environment.

Within the context of biodiversity, members of the YSG brought up the issue of the common belief that 'planting more trees' is the way to solve environmental problems. Therefore, it was suggested that further information on actions that can aid the increase in biodiversity could be collated, such as the benefits of growing food along with other more conventional plants such as grasses and flowers.

**In summary, the main areas in which the YSG recommend intervention are:**

- **Small scale individual plots, as these, when put together can create a large difference, and will also aid in the creation of an environmentally conscious community atmosphere**
- **Other community spaces for large-scale projects, some of which may be able to offer educational experiences**
- **Commercial settings which have scope for large impacts in both rural and urban areas.**

## 5.4 Communication Strategy

Communication is a priority for the YSG. To better communicate the values of, and threats to, biodiversity to people of all ages, and particularly to young people, the group suggested that the following courses of action would be most effective.

Primarily, messages should be aimed at showing young people the beauty of the natural world and making them truly appreciate its value so they know exactly what is at stake. This could be achieved by inviting young people to nature reserves through visits organised by schools or youth groups, or by communicating with young people through other young people. Recruit and develop a group who can act as green ambassadors for their area, so that they will encourage other young people to participate in environmental action. Young people tend to follow their peers as opposed to ministers or politicians who they often feel that they cannot relate to. Young people can often feel overwhelmed and there are lots of negative images of them presented within the press, so simple, effective and positive messages about what people can do would be the most effective. Such messages would be especially effective when coupled with the right incentive, as it is beneficial to have people feeling a connection with the action and purpose, as it adds to a sense of identity.

To participate in solutions to environmental issues, accessibility of relevant information about how they can become involved and see what the government has planned is essential. Awareness of the kind of actions people can be making to support biodiversity needs to be raised, and to make this effective and sustainable these actions also need to be about building a community with values that reflect its beliefs. A prime example of this is action would be Todmorden in Yorkshire. This small town has committed itself to action to increase its use of green space, creating on-street allotment spaces and building a real community identity around becoming environmentally friendly by reducing food miles and increasing support for pollinators. The YSG believe that it is beneficial to co-create as many elements of a strategy as possible, due to the fact that it will help to spread costs and responsibility as well as being suitable for as many people as possible, and the removal of barriers will encourage more people to participate.

There were some criticisms of current communication strategies that came up throughout the review, with members of the YSG unaware of some government initiatives such 'Bees Needs week'<sup>1</sup> or broader pollinator supporting work, such as planting native pollinator- friendly flowers, or avoiding pesticides. In addition, some over-simplified messages had led to confusion, which is also not beneficial. One example given by the YSG was the trend to put a teaspoon of honey out for bees, which does not realistically help pollinators. To communicate the ideas of these topics its best to make sure that the right voices, eg. environmental experts and activists are used to communicate messages, over MPs, to appropriate audiences as they are more relatable and trusted by young people. When discussing environmental issues, it should be ensured that there's clarity in all messaging, so the public can become

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1 <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/09/bees-needs-week-returns-and-countryside-productivity-small-grants-scheme-funding/>

better informed and motivated to participate in helping the environment.

The most effective way that the government could send a clear message about its intentions around the environment would be to provide funding to those community groups that are exemplifying best practice. To encourage the most people to participate in environmental initiatives it must be made easy and cost-effective to make the 'right' choice. It was noted that currently it is just farmers who benefit from the subsidies for land management, and that similar schemes could be set up for other groups to do public and environmental good so that they can help to manage land well. Specific groups that may benefit from this include local gardening groups, and also housebuilders who should be encouraged that building on greenfield sites should not be detrimental to the environment and local biodiversity. Helping communities to have more power and funding to organise their own local green spaces will be a very effective way of communicating the desired direction of the country's environmental policy.

**In conclusion, the recommendations for improving communication given by the YSG are:**

- **Clarity is key to effectiveness and engagement levels**
- **Positive messaging should be prioritized, including announcements and case studies of best practice.**

# 6. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

## 6.1 Overview

Throughout the course of the review, the Youth Steering Group has made various observations regarding the manner by which the Government engages with young people to better communicate environment and climate change issues and how they and their everyday behaviour can help us with the solutions.

## 6.2 Youth Engagement Methods

The importance of the Government's approach to youth engagement should not be underestimated since it is young people who will inherit the environment in the future. The YSG, therefore, believes that the Government has a moral duty to engage with as many young people as possible. The methods that the Government may deploy in order to do this are outlined below.

The YSG firmly believe that the most effective method that can be used to communicate environmental and climate change issues to young people is to create localised, grass roots initiatives that will empower young people to take action within their local communities. One member cited the example of a competition for local schools to create a flower garden which occurs in their local area, as an example of a local initiative creating a positive impact. Other organisations that government departments could seek to partner with, in an attempt to engage with a wide range of young people include: local youth work units as mentioned in section two (Key Recommendations), UK Youth Parliament, and uniformed youth groups (such as Girlguiding, the Army Cadet Force and Police Cadet Force). Localised campaigns have the ability to be extremely effective since many young people feel a strong sense of loyalty and identity to the area in which they live. As a result of this, young people are more likely to engage in a campaign that will improve their own community. Furthermore, the concept of participating in national campaigns can be daunting for young people, creating a barrier to participation. Achieving a small change within a local area, such as planting a small flower garden to provide a space for pollinators to flourish, seems much more achievable. It is felt that this sense of an achievable outcome helps to motivate young people to engage with, and remain consistently involved in, environmental campaigns.

One such example of a movement that began as a localized initiative and has since grown significantly into an international one is the 'Fridays for Future' climate change strikes involving predominantly young people. These climate strikes have been successful for numerous reasons, but one key reason that they have grown so rapidly into an international movement is because best practice was celebrated and shared by the media. The movement had humble beginnings as a localised event. Due to the significant media presence around this movement, others watching on were

inspired into action. We believe that departments working on climate change and the environment should seek to follow this model with future campaigns by celebrating best practice when it presents itself in localised campaigns. Celebrating best practice can be achieved effectively by using social media marketing to reach mass audiences. Demonstrating how others have been able to convert a campaign vision into reality not only makes the actions seem more achievable, but it also inspires others into action. Girlguiding provides an example of how this can be achieved, as they are currently running a campaign which calls on young members to be 'Planet Protectors'. In this campaign, they celebrate the work of individuals and local groups that take action to be more environmentally friendly by using social media to recognise their work.

The YSG also believe that the platforms that Defra and BEIS use to convey their messages to young people, and to share best practice on, are of paramount importance. The YSG has previously worked on a digital youth engagement project<sup>2</sup> and we found that trends have a habit of changing quickly and, in recent experience, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are now often viewed as 'outdated' by the younger generations. This means they may be less effective platforms for the Government to use when attempting to engage with young people. In order to effectively target young people and ensure that the messaging Defra and BEIS are seeking to convey reaches as wide a range of young people as possible, the group suggested the use of platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. As these platforms are 'on-trend', they are more likely to be used by young people, thus giving the ability to reach out to large numbers of young people if used effectively. Ultimately, the key is to place the information where young people are, rather than making them go looking for the information. As trends are constantly emerging and changing, the YSG believe that the Government should regularly engage with an established youth panel to ensure that digital messages remain as relevant as possible to young people. This group could also help the Government to identify influencers who could be enlisted to support government campaigns.

Following on from this, it is also imperative that campaigns and messages are conveyed to young people by relatable and relevant figures. Enlisting the support of high-profile figures such as celebrities and 'vloggers' would greatly aid in reaching a wider audience of young people. Given the current political climate, many young people feel disconnected with political figures. Consequently, young people are believed to be far more likely to participate in an action being advocated by a nonpartisan influencer who is trusted and viewed as a role model by young people. Therefore, we believe that following such a strategy would be highly beneficial to Defra and BEIS's youth engagement in the future.

Finally, the YSG feel that youth engagement within the education system is an area that Defra and BEIS should seek to explore in association with the Department for Education and other relevant departments. Ultimately, a school setting is the one place where there will regularly be vast numbers of young people and so it would be beneficial for this area to be targeted as a specific focus. Defra should encourage

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2 <https://www.themix.org.uk/news-and-research/blogs/youth-voice-steering-group>

schools to be seen to be leading by example, providing opportunities for young people to hear the Government's environmental messages and to participate in their campaigns. This could be done through life skills lessons, in which positive environmental behaviours, such as meal planning to reduce waste, or making basic household repairs were taught, to better prepare students for life as environmentally conscious members of society.

**In summary, based on the experiences of YSG members, the following suggestions were made:**

- **Use specialised local campaigns which are long-lasting, give a sense of ownership to participants, and can be adapted to fit varying requirements and barriers.**
- **Promote messages about the environment, while keeping in mind that the same message may be received by young people differently depending on both the person and platform it was seen to come from.**
- **To achieve effective engagement, we believe the Government should establish a group of climate champions that they will continue to engage with regularly on environmental issues, following on from the work of the YSG. By ensuring constant contact with young people, feedback can be given so that digital messages can remain relevant and adapt as trends change.**
- **Through education, provide young people with the skills and knowledge that will encourage them to inflict less damage on our environment.**

### **6.3 Youth Engagement Within Policy Consultations**

The final recommendations from the YSG pertain to the routes in which young people can be directly engaged in policy review and consultation so that their views can be taken into account.

Traditionally, the engagement of young people in policy review and consultations has been low due to the accessibility of such reviews and documents. When wanting to gather the views of young people, it is essential that the fact that they are not climate change scientists or civil servants is remembered and kept in mind throughout the process. While avoiding being patronising, the excessive and unnecessary use of jargon creates barriers to participation for many young people. Adapting resources and consultations for a young audience by using alternative mediums such as video or social media will make them seem more accessible and appealing. It is also pertinent to remember that they are usually doing a similar job to a paid consultant for free, and that this should be reflected in the workload.

The use of social media as a tool in policy consultations is an idea that the YSG have explored extensively, both in their review with Defra and in their work with other departments. While we understand that there may be issues surrounding the

accuracy of the data gained from responses to social media posts, initial consultation questions can be posed on social media to 'hook' young people and draw them into a consultation. For example, Defra may post on their Instagram account the question 'do you believe that the current recycling system in your local area is effective?', utilising the feature of 'swipe up for more' to allow young people who are engaged to continue to the consultation document. Using the accounts of celebrities who are admired by young people, or adverts on platforms young people use frequently, such as Snapchat and YouTube would greatly increase the reach of such questions, in turn widening the accessibility of the policy consultations linked to these adverts.

In addition to this, the establishment of a feedback loop between the Government and young people is essential to continual engagement. Maintaining a dialogue between young people and policy making teams, in a way that enables participants in consultations to see how their views have been considered, is key. If young people feel as though they are valued and listened to, then they are far more likely to engage again in the future.

Finally, the YSG recommends that Defra and BEIS consult young people from the very outset of campaign planning, allowing them the opportunity to shape projects in the direction they believe it would be beneficial for them to follow. By developing a network of 'Green Ambassadors' across the country, who would be supported and trained by the Government, Defra and BEIS would be able to develop an automatic link to thousands of young people nationwide. Such a campaign would greatly support the diversity of views reached and would develop a network of young leaders who would act as passionate advocates for environmental and climate policies within their local communities. This allows for the localised network of campaigns discussed above to be systematically developed and deployed according to the environmental priorities at a given time.

**The final recommendations from the YSG to the Government are:**

- **Modernise policy consultations and make them more accessible to young people. This can be achieved by reducing jargon in policy documents and by using social media to raise awareness of consultations.**
- **For a campaign to be effective for young people, there should be input from young people during all stages, and this input should come from a diverse group of individuals.**
- **Accountability should be evident at all stages, youth engagement is a valuable process and should not be treated as a 'tick-box exercise'. This means that young people should be able to see tangible outcomes from the information that they have provided, and so feel valued.**

# 7. CONCLUSION

The YSG acknowledge that we face significant challenges at the present time in an attempt to safeguard our planet for future generations. As the generation who will be inheriting the planet, we are thankful for the opportunity to have our voices heard throughout this process, and believe it is imperative that the Government continues to consult young people on environmental matters. By ensuring that all communications are clear, concise and accessible, and by developing channels through which the Government's message can reach young people effectively, this can be achieved.



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