



Sustainable
Development Commission

Improving Young People's Lives

The role of the environment in
building resilience, responsibility
and employment chances

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Drafting team

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The Commission is grateful to the Department for funding this report; it should be noted, however, that it does not necessarily reflect the views of the Department or all project participants. The conclusions and recommendations are solely those of the Sustainable Development Commission.

In reaching the Commission's view, we have drawn heavily on our previously published reports, most noticeably from:

- *Health, place and nature: How outdoor environments influence health and wellbeing: a knowledge base*
- *Every Child's Future Matters: Why the environment should be a key consideration in child wellbeing*
- *Prosperity without Growth? The Transition to a Sustainable Economy*
- *Sustainable Development: The Key to Tackling Health Inequalities*

all of which are available at www.sd-commission.org.uk

Foreword

Our goal for young people is to provide them with the richest possible opportunities to learn, achieve and secure their health and quality of life into the long-term.

This may not seem easy to achieve for a young person of 14 who is experiencing failure at school and upheaval at home; who has a poor diet and is living on a dangerous, polluted street. Yet we must find solutions. We cannot risk staying where we are, or slipping backwards. Ingenuity, innovation and risk – and above all new thinking – are urgently needed.

One promising source of this new thinking lies with the environment. To date, thinking and working on the environment has not featured prominently in policy making on young people. This means that a range of important, life-changing opportunities for young people have potentially been underplayed or not scaled up from pilots. With local communities set to take on a greater role in deciding their own priorities and services, the emergence of a green economy, and a national need to develop civic responsibility in young people, this could not be a better time to explore how a green approach can drive innovation.

Many of the examples presented in this report illustrate a preventative approach to tackling the challenges many young people face. However, we know that money will be incredibly tight in the short to medium-term, so how can government on a local and national scale justify expenditure on preventative programmes with so many other competing demands? Put simply, it cannot afford *not* to.

The costs to the health, justice and welfare systems of not investing to avoid problems are hugely greater than preventative work – without even considering the benefits to individuals and opportunities to build more cohesive, responsible communities. Recent research estimates the overall cost of doing nothing to improve life outcomes for children, young people and families in the UK to be almost £4 trillion over the next 20 years.¹ This includes the cost of loss of productivity from 16-19 year olds being not in education, employment or training (NEET), NHS costs from obesity, and the costs of crime to both public spending and the wider economy.

The approaches highlighted in this report are not about coercing young people into delivering environmental objectives. In fact the session we held with young people during this project showed that many are actively interested in improving their environment. Instead, we look at how involvement in environmental activity can positively influence young people's personal development, health and life chances, especially for those most at risk of unemployment, poor health or offending.

As well as focusing on the needs of young people today, who can benefit immediately from our proposals, we are also conscious of the needs of future generations. The green thread through policy and practice proposed in this report tackles both dimensions simultaneously. It provides a compelling context within which to respond to locally determined needs, galvanise programmes like the National Citizen Service, and contribute to the wider ambition of a healthier, greener and more responsible society.

Ann Finlayson

Commissioner for Education

Executive summary

Given the right support and experiences to develop their physical and mental health as well as their social and practical skills, all young people have the potential to become valued members of their local communities and take personal responsibility for their actions. For those young people who experience problems, the consequences could include poor mental health, long-term unemployment, or engaging in criminal or anti-social behaviour. These consequences also carry a cost to society; for example, anti-social behaviour in the UK costs the public £3.4 billion a year.²

There are many factors that can influence outcomes for young people. The environment is one factor that plays a key role. It can influence young people's development through the quality of place in which they live, whilst also providing opportunities for activities, approaches and learning that can engage and support even the most disaffected young people, enabling them to overcome barriers to participation.

Our report proposes a green thread through policy and practice, where the impact of the environment is considered alongside social and economic factors – the building blocks of sustainable development. To date, this has been the missing element in most policy making for young people, and is only sporadically evident in local delivery. We demonstrate how taking this broader approach can improve outcomes for young people, whilst supporting the Government's aims for a Big Society and being the 'greenest Government ever'.

How can sustainable development improve outcomes for young people?

To answer this, we commissioned an analysis of the available UK and overseas research, supported by case studies, from which, we identified three principal outcomes for young people where the environment can have an impact:

- Jobs and employability
- Resilience, health and behaviour
- Personal responsibility

We explored these themes with a range of stakeholders including organisations actively working with or for young people, young people participating in a national youth leadership programme, and government officials.

Whilst acknowledging the significant range of existing methods used by practitioners to support outcomes for young people, it was beyond the scope of this report to make a comparison between them and the approaches presented here. Instead, this report focuses exclusively on the role of the environment.

Each theme explores the challenges facing policy makers and commissioners and providers of services for young people. We set out evidence for how the environment can improve outcomes for young people, resulting in proposals to enable action at a local level that support our proposed green approach to policy, and the programme of the Government.

1 Jobs and employability

The recent recession has resulted in fewer young people in employment and more classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET). There are a variety of reasons why young people become NEET. In some cases the reasons can lead to a failure to attend school and gain basic skills, resulting in longer term effects, such as an

increased likelihood of becoming young offenders and a reduced likelihood of finding employment. These young people need support to overcome their personal barriers to participation, and through engaging in activities that support the development of their basic skills, enable them to gain long-term employment.

The role of the environment in building young people's employment chances

Based on the evidence presented, we propose:

- Young people are prepared for the emerging green economy, so they have the right skills and academic or vocational qualifications to take advantage of the new green job opportunities that will become available across a range of sectors and have differing levels of entry to employment.
- The environment is used to help young people into long-term employment through programmes that

build their social and personal skills, whilst providing accreditation and opening up potential career options.

Given the current economic climate, this support should be prioritised for those young people who are NEET, particularly through early intervention programmes and alternative provision. Environmental opportunities that offer practical hands-on learning, training and job opportunities, including environmental accreditation and awards, can be particularly effective in engaging the most disaffected young people.

2 Resilience, health and behaviour

There have been significant rises in obesity and clinically diagnosed mental health disorders in young people, trends that are expected to continue. These physical and mental health factors can affect young people's personal and social development, resilience to shocks and stresses, and behaviour, which can then impact on the places where they

live. With issues such as climate change, poverty, resource scarcity and population change, all bringing possible rapid changes and periods of uncertainty, developing resilience in young people to enable them to recover from the effects of these is vitally important.

The role of the environment in building young people's resilience

Based on the evidence presented, we propose:

- Young people are encouraged to connect with and shape the places where they live – they can help improve their local area on issues such as increasing road safety, accessibility of green spaces and personal safety.
- Support is given to young people to increase their physical activity through low-cost programmes to

promote walking and cycling, and regular exercise in green places, both within and outside of school, through the greater use of outdoor spaces.

- Structured outdoor learning or environmental therapeutic programmes such as Forest Schools are set up to support the engagement and rehabilitation of disaffected young people, particularly through early intervention programmes or alternative provision.

3 Personal responsibility

Disengagement of young people from civic society is a concern. Young people are less likely than adults to be involved in their local communities or undertake formal voluntary work, whilst anti-social behaviour is a major

issue in some of the most deprived or disadvantaged communities. Participation in community projects can positively impact on health, educational achievement, employment outcomes, and lower crime levels.

The role of the environment in building young people's responsibility

Based on the evidence presented, we propose:

- Structured opportunities for young people that could potentially provide stepping stones to employment are developed within environmental and community organisations.

- Young people are supported and enabled to lead community-based projects to take action on local issues they care about.

These provide opportunities for young people to develop personal responsibility and could support implementation of the National Citizen Service and the Government's ambitions for the Big Society.

Conclusions and recommendations

The evidence presented in this report shows that our proposed green thread through policy and practice can inspire innovative approaches to achieving better outcomes for young people.

The proposals set out in each section provide pointers for how services can be developed to incorporate the environmental dimension through leadership on a local

level. We also believe a stronger steer is needed from Government to highlight the benefits in terms of value for money and successful outcomes for young people, to ensure more universal implementation.

To this end we have put forward a small number of strategic recommendations for both policy makers and those commissioning and providing services for young people.

Recommendations for Government

These are primarily relevant to the work of the Department for Education. They also have relevance to a number of Government departments whose work has a direct impact on young people's lives.

1 Run a green thread through policy ensuring the impact of the environment is considered alongside social and economic issues.

The Government's commitment to be the 'greenest ever' and programmes such as the National Citizen Service provide a real opportunity to demonstrate the environmental dimension through policy statements and communications to stimulate action at a local level.

2 Expand green activity through demonstrating the long-term economic and social benefits to enable social investment.

Through commissioning a robust analysis (using economic modelling) of the long-term economic and social benefits of positive environmental activities for young people, Government can strengthen the evidence presented within this report and enable local providers to demonstrate the potential impact of their proposals, and how they will measure this, to funders.

Recommendations for commissioners and providers of services for young people

These are relevant to a range of organisations, including but not limited to, local authority youth services, schools (including alternative provision), pupil referral units, Youth Offending Teams, Connexions, youth groups, and local community and environmental organisations.

3 Empower the workforce to run an environmental dimension through their work with young people.

The capacity of frontline staff should be built at a local level, with clear direction from their leaders through appropriate requirements in service specifications, facilitating join-up with other local service providers and partners, and enabling the sharing of good practice.

4 Focus on prevention through entitling young people to participate in environmental activities.

Through the provision of environmental activities, both in universal provision and targeted support and alternative provision for disaffected learners, young people can be supported to develop resilience and self-esteem, boost their mental and physical health, improve their achievements and take responsibility for their actions.

5 Draw on expertise of voluntary and community organisations.

Those involved in the commissioning of services for young people should draw on the insight and resources of community groups, charities and social enterprises, and work in partnership to provide high quality environmental opportunities for young people that primarily focus on the development of their social and personal skills.

I

Introduction



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Background

Most young people grow up to become valued members of their communities, but for those who do not the consequences personally and to society can be costly. Long-term unemployment, mental health issues, crime and anti-social behaviour, low self-esteem, and early parenthood are all associated with a failure to nurture young people through the difficult period of teenage years. The financial costs to society can be high. For example, keeping one young offender in custody costs an estimated £90,000 per year.³

There are many reasons why young people experience these problems, including the quality of support they receive at home, family income and a lack of positive role models,⁵ as well the quality of place where they live.⁶ These factors combine to influence the choices young people make, shaping their behaviour and degree of resilience to the risks they will encounter over their lifetimes. Some risks are well known – unemployment, ill-health, crime – whilst others are harder to predict, for example the consequences of climate change on food prices and security.

A recent Government-commissioned assessment reported that trends in youth crime and anti-social behaviour levels are static. There are high levels of poor mental health in young people, and inequalities in achievement. The number of obese young people is still rising, and rates of young people not in education, employment or training, whilst not rising, are too high.⁶

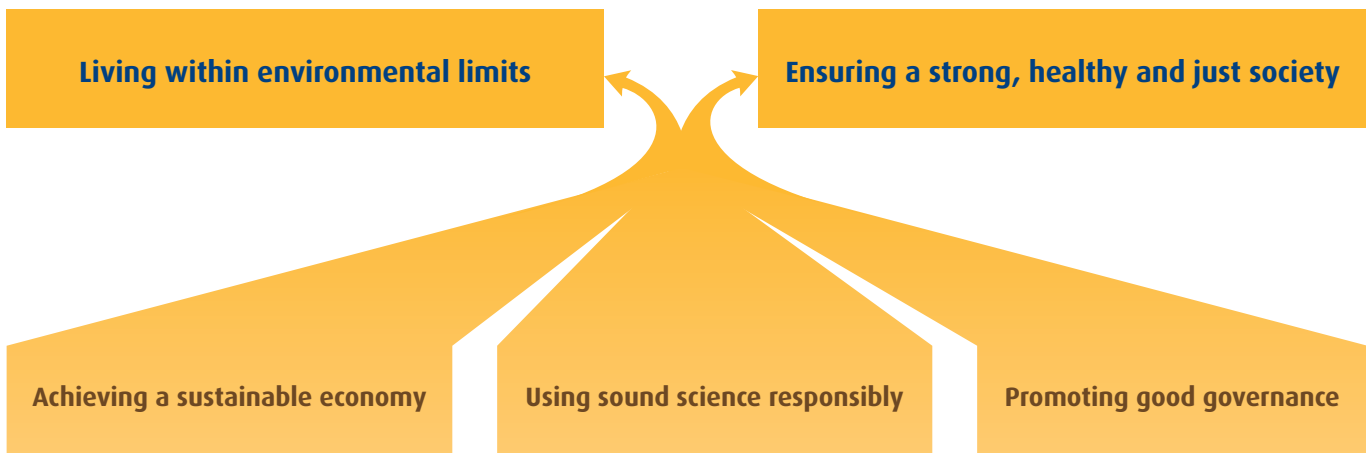
There is an opportunity now to bring new thinking to bear on these challenges. We believe this will be found by looking at the causes of the problems more holistically, and encouraging a broader range of solutions to be offered by local partners. In particular, we propose that a 'green thread' is run through both policy and practice to deal with the realities and interests of young people in 21st century Britain.

Our approach

The starting point and guiding question for this report was **‘How can sustainable development improve outcomes for young people?’** This requires clarity on two further questions: **‘what is sustainable development’**, and **‘what outcomes for young people are we seeking to achieve?’**

What is sustainable development?

The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and achieve a better quality of life through living within environmental limits.⁷ Five principles define what this means for policy making:



Sustainable development is sometimes assumed to be synonymous with the green agenda and action to reduce our environmental impact. As the principles above show, it is in fact much broader: it is about thinking and learning in a profoundly different way. The defining features of sustainable development are a long-term outlook, a cross-cutting or ‘whole-systems’ view of policy problems, and a commitment to tackle causes of underlying problems rather than solely moderate their symptoms.

At the heart of sustainable development is the issue of intergenerational equity, or how well we look after the planet today so as not to disadvantage future generations. By definition young people have most at stake if we do not achieve this, which is why sustainable development has a particular resonance with many young people.

What outcomes for young people are we seeking to achieve?

To succeed as adults, young people need to acquire a range of social and practical skills to enable them to find employment, form relationships, take responsibility and become full members of their communities. Their experiences during this time have a strong influence on later outcomes, for example, the degree to which they participate in education; stay emotionally and physically healthy; learn to cope with the demands of adolescence and becoming an adult; experience a safe and supportive family life; and take part in positive, responsibility building activities at home and school.

Whilst recognising that these outcomes are important for all young people, this report is primarily concerned with those experiencing the greatest challenges, where sustainable development has the most potential value to add. We have also limited our focus to young people between the ages of 14-19, though in many cases our recommendations are also applicable before and beyond this age range, enabling consistency and progression.

How can sustainable development improve outcomes for young people?

In order to answer this question, we commissioned the national children's charity, Action for Children, to conduct a literature review of recent UK and overseas research to identify relevant work, using the analysis above as their guide. They also drew out examples of good practice taking place at a local level that address the needs of particular groups of young people.

From their findings we identified three principle outcomes for young people that would benefit from an environmental dimension: **employability and jobs; resilience, health**

and behaviour; and personal responsibility. We explored these themes through a series of workshops to gather feedback from a range of stakeholders (see Annex 1 for details).

Whilst acknowledging the significant range of existing methods used by practitioners to support outcomes for young people, it was beyond the scope of this report to make a comparison between them and the approaches presented here. Instead, this report focuses exclusively on the role of the environment in enhancing policy and practice.

Our findings

The purpose of our report is to present findings for the role of the environment in improving young people's lives through building their resilience, responsibility and employment chances. To this end we have developed proposals that aim to influence changes in local delivery, and we have given recommendations for how this can be supported by policy at a national level.

In each of the three thematic chapters that follow, we begin by looking at the facts and figures behind the challenges facing young people and, therefore, policy makers today. We then introduce evidence of what works in practice, supported by case studies, showing how an environmental dimension can contribute to improving outcomes for young people.

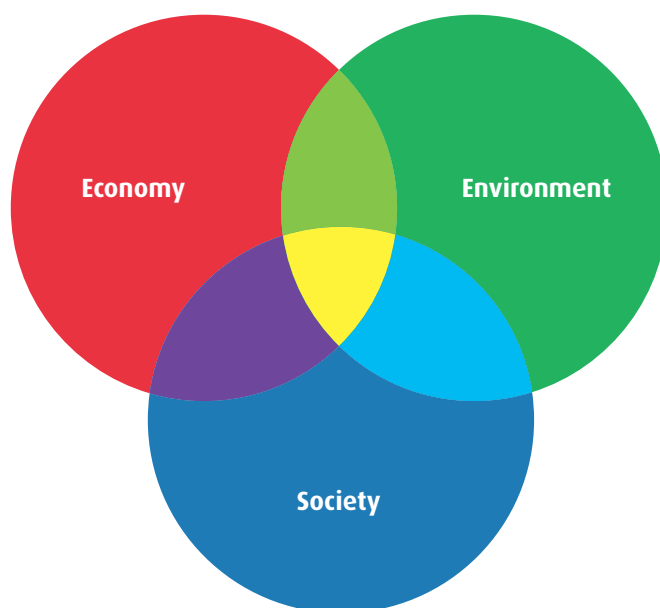
- **Employability and jobs:** enabling participation in the green economy, and using environmental activity as a stepping stone to employment.
- **Resilience, health and behaviour:** green exercise, active travel and structured programmes in the environment to turn around disaffected young people.
- **Personal responsibility:** empowering young people through environmental action and volunteering.

Whilst some of the evidence highlighted will not be new to all practitioners, implementation is far from universal at present. We therefore end each chapter with a wide range of suggestions for how local authorities, voluntary and community organisations and businesses can make better use of the environment in their commissioning and service delivery – something we have described as a 'green thread' through their work.

The final chapter offers a concluding analysis and recommendations for how our proposed green thread can be realised through national and local support to the benefit of both current and future generations.

We arrived at this proposal by looking at policy for young people from three interlinked perspectives: social, economic and environmental – the building blocks of sustainable development (see Figure 1). Each casts a different and complementary light on a problem, and all three should be visible in policy formulation, commissioning and service delivery. If this is not the case then important connections can be missed, and the door is

Figure 1 The building blocks of sustainable development

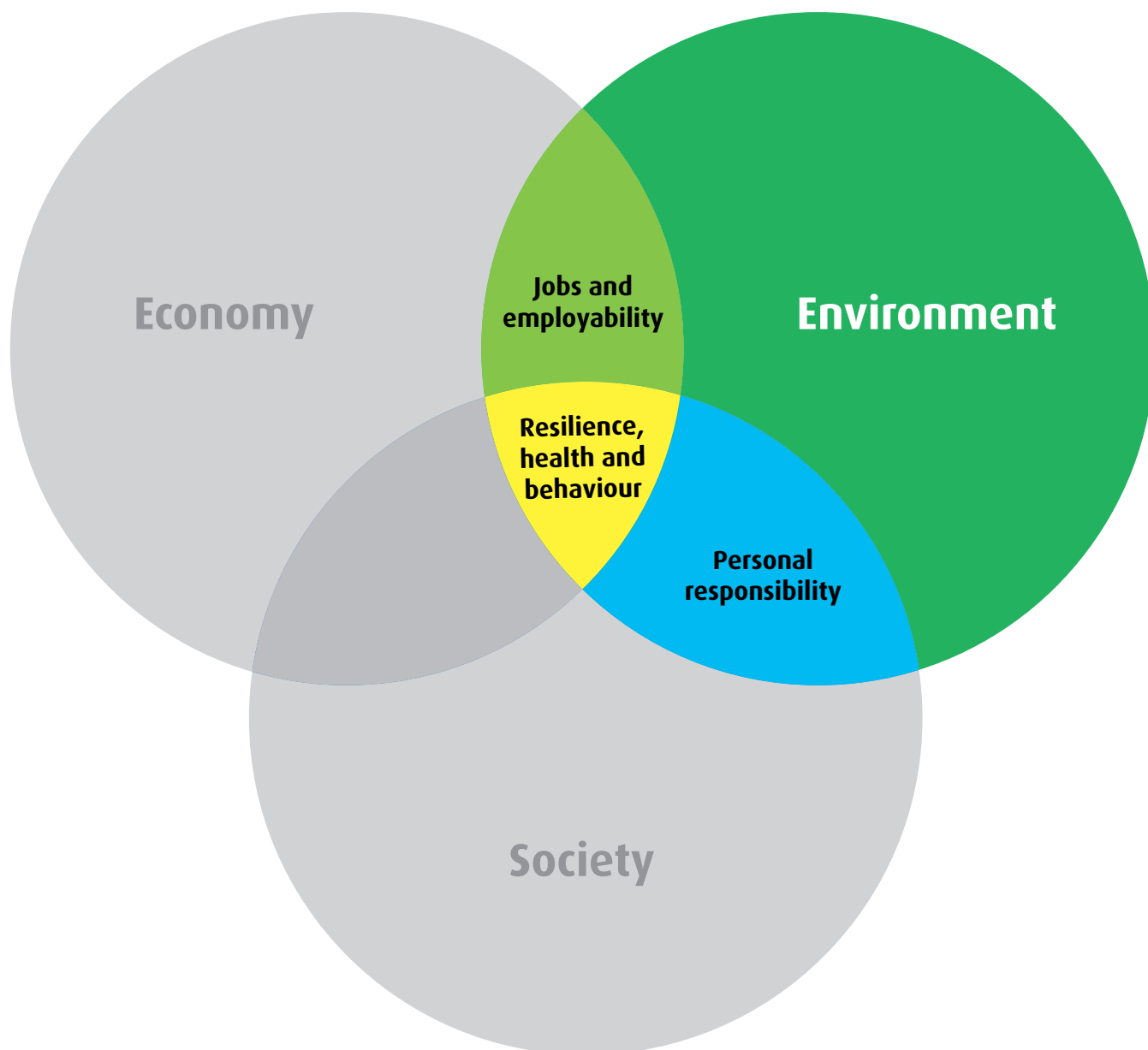


left open to unforeseen, and undesirable, possibly costly, burdens falling on other parts of Government or local support systems for young people.

Policy on young people is conventionally informed by social and economic analysis; the environmental dimension is very often missing. In the interests of achieving real improvement in young people's lives we believe this now needs to change, including at a local level where the same logic is often replicated.

As the examples and analysis in this report show, the environment can enhance social and economic outcomes for young people, playing a crucial role in their future prospects, physical and mental health, and behaviour, as well as being an area of considerable interest to many young people, where important responsibilities can be developed. This is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows how a green thread through policy and practice creates important opportunities to develop the employment chances, resilience and responsibility of young people.

Figure 2 How the environment can enhance social and economic outcomes for young people



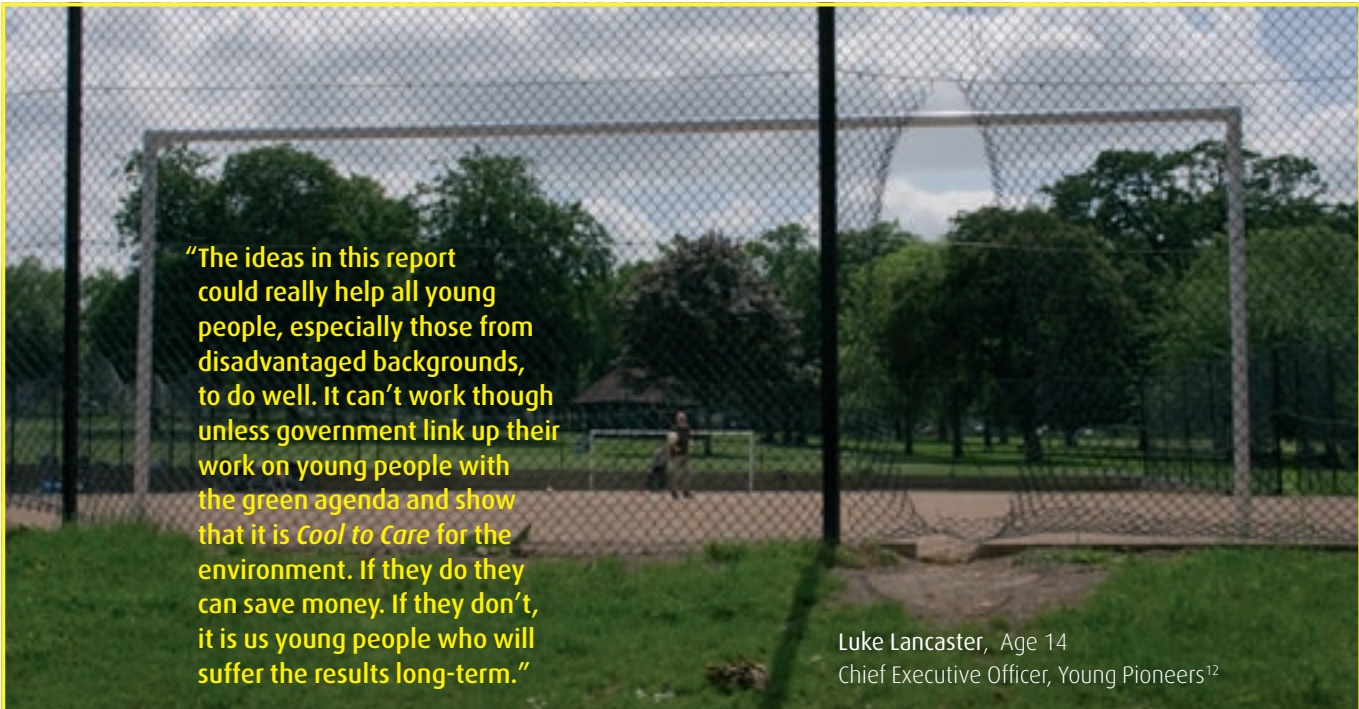
Resonance with national policy

The three themes we present in this report resonate strongly with a number of the Government's priorities, especially its ambitions to empower communities through the **Big Society** and to be the **greenest Government ever**. For example, schools supporting the approaches outlined in this report as part of their early intervention work will not only raise standards and further their behaviour objectives, they will also nurture civic responsibility amongst young people and their families; and contribute directly to Government objectives on community cohesion, offending, climate change and the natural environment.

"Learning about sustainability captured the interest of children and young people because they could see its relevance to their own lives."

Ofsted 2009⁹

The **National Citizen Service**⁹ could benefit from including environmental opportunities in its range of focus areas, enabling young people to make a significant contribution to local sustainability whilst learning important skills and staying healthy. Similarly, the commitment to **full participation of young people in education or training up to the age of 18** will create demand for vocational programmes of value to future employers, and which meet the skills needs of one of the Government's principal environmental aims: **a strong and sustainable green economy**.¹⁰ A number of the approaches we highlight directly target young offenders and have the potential to reduce reoffending rates through **revolutionising rehabilitation**.¹¹



"The ideas in this report could really help all young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to do well. It can't work though unless government link up their work on young people with the green agenda and show that it is *Cool to Care* for the environment. If they do they can save money. If they don't, it is us young people who will suffer the results long-term."

Luke Lancaster, Age 14
Chief Executive Officer, Young Pioneers¹²

A further aim of the Government is to **enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life**.¹³ Much of this is dependent on people forming a new or different relationship with nature; one based on an improved understanding of its value, direct experience

and enjoyment of natural places, and a resulting sense of respect and care. The approaches highlighted in this report provide powerful vehicles for achieving this amongst young people.

2

Jobs and employability

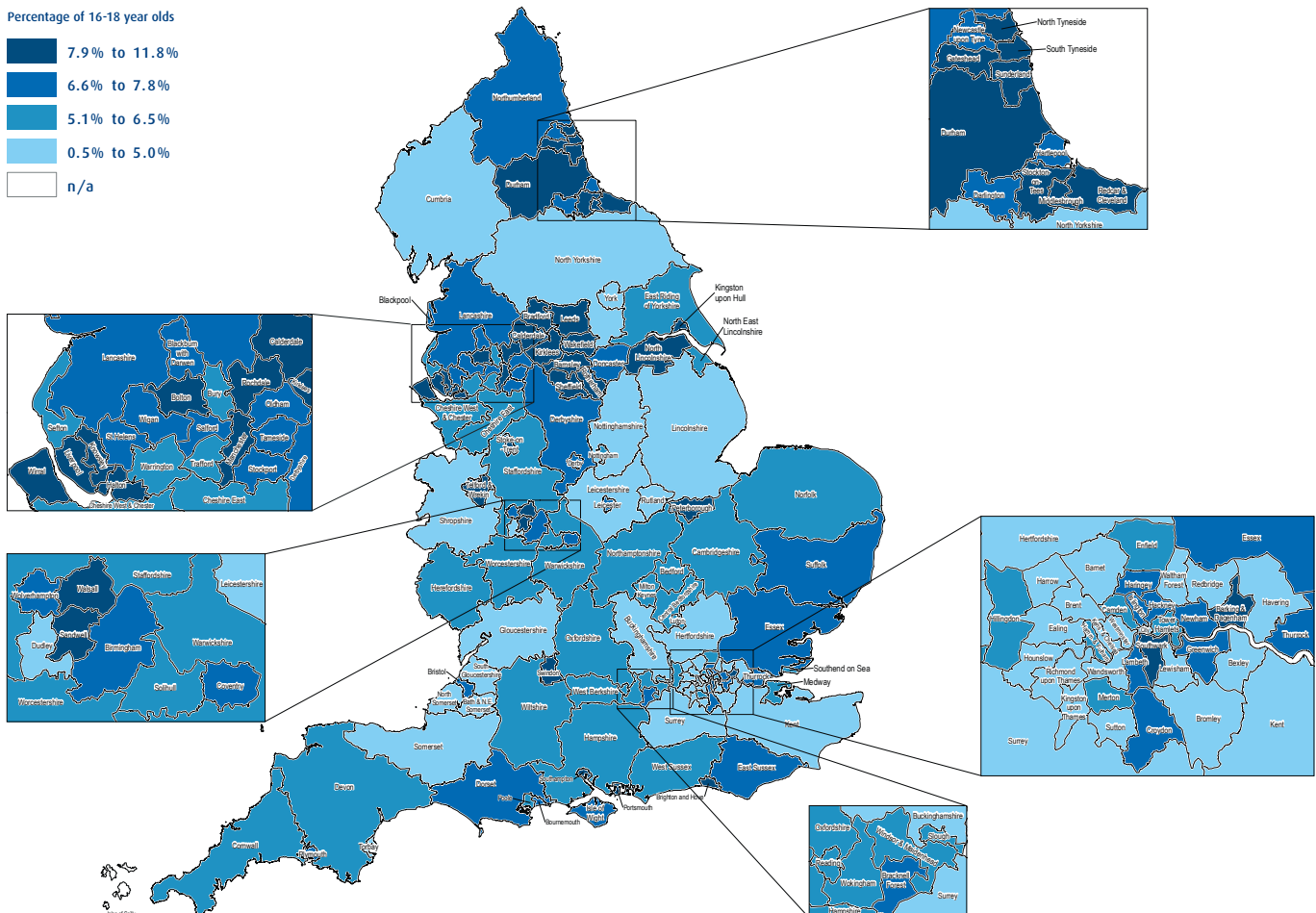
Developing the skills and knowledge young people need to find long-term employment

The issue: youth unemployment

Youth unemployment is under the spotlight: the global economic downturn has led to significant increases in the level and rate of youth unemployment in the UK. The number of unemployed 16-24 year olds in the UK rose from 678,000 in 2008 to 943,000 in 2009; and the corresponding unemployment rate rose from 13.8 per cent in 2008 to 20.0 per cent in 2009.¹⁴ Young people generally experience higher rates of unemployment than older adults, which partly reflects the greater dynamism and changeability in the youth labour market. During the 2008-09 recession, young people experienced the largest falls in employment, and the greatest rise in their unemployment rate. The more recent fall in youth unemployment is a positive sign, but there is still a long way to go.

The downturn has also affected the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Whilst employment fell significantly, the number of young people participating in education or training increased. For the youngest in this age group, the rise in participation was greater than the fall in employment, so NEET rates fell; but for the oldest in the age group rising participation did not offset falling employment, and NEET rates rose during the recession. The official statistics for England showed 183,000 16-18 year olds NEET at the end of 2009¹⁵ (see Figures 3, 4 and 5). This figure is very high and equated to over nine per cent of 16-18 year olds. Being NEET is associated with negative outcomes later in life, including unemployment, poor health and depression – as a result, a conservative estimate of the lifetime public finance cost per person NEET at age 16-18 was around £50,000 in 2002.¹⁶

Figure 3 The proportion of 16-18 year olds who are NEET, 2009¹⁷



There are a variety of reasons why young people end up in the NEET category (see Figure 6).^{18,19} Some do as a consequence of becoming involved with anti-social or criminal behaviour. This can be prompted by a range of factors: a lack of support from their families, experiencing poverty in the home, poor public services, living in neighbourhoods affected by crime and deprivation, or a lack of other opportunities.²⁰ All can lead to truancy from school and eventual exclusion, failure to obtain basic skills and qualifications, and other potential challenges to overcome, such as addiction or a criminal record.

The effects can be long-term: children with behavioural problems at age 11 are less likely to be employed at age

42;²¹ and nearly 75 per cent of young offenders who are imprisoned were previously excluded from school at some stage.²² Retention of young people in the education system is therefore pivotal though, to be effective, strategies should focus on overcoming the barriers young people face to successful participation in learning.²³ Pupil referral units and alternative provision can play a crucial role in this through addressing young people's need and raising their aspirations to prevent future problems. At any one time there are nearly 70,000 pupils in some form of alternative provision, with short-term placements meaning the numbers passing through alternative provision annually are about double this – around 135,000.²⁴

Figure 4 Comparison of youth unemployment rates with the working age unemployment rate, 1992-2010²⁵

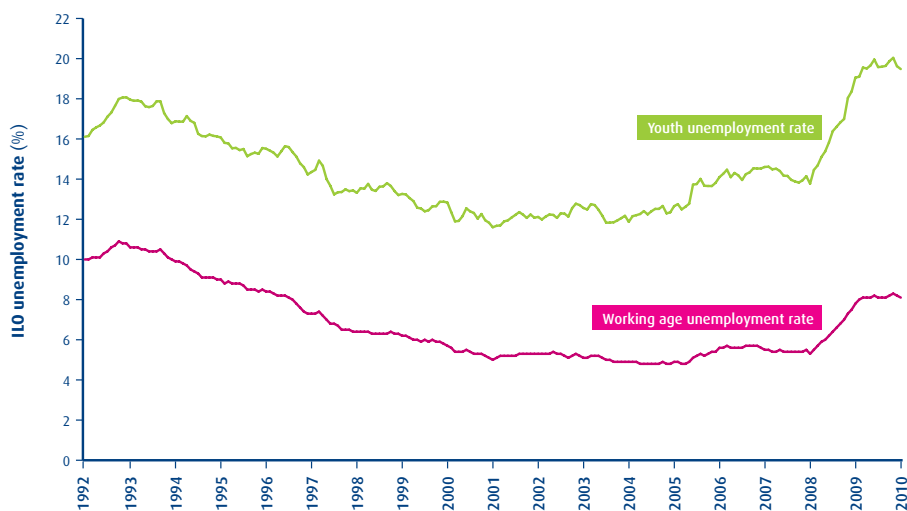
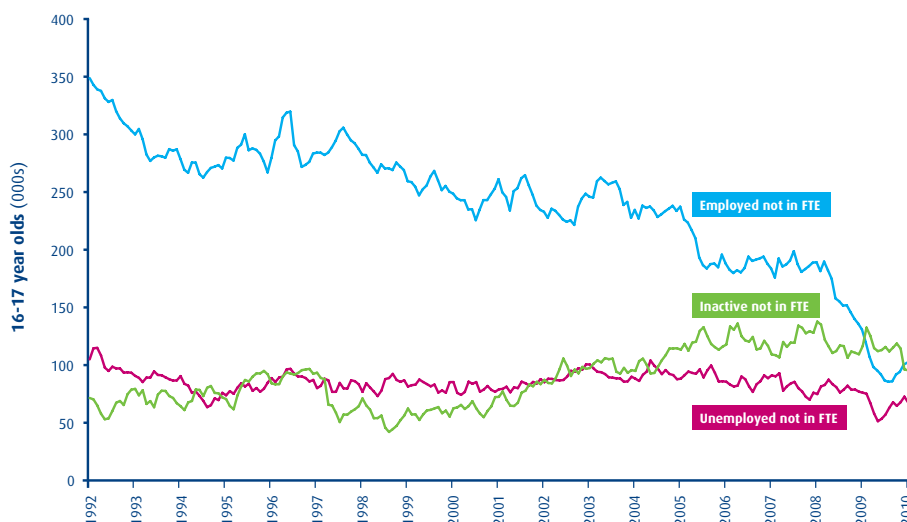


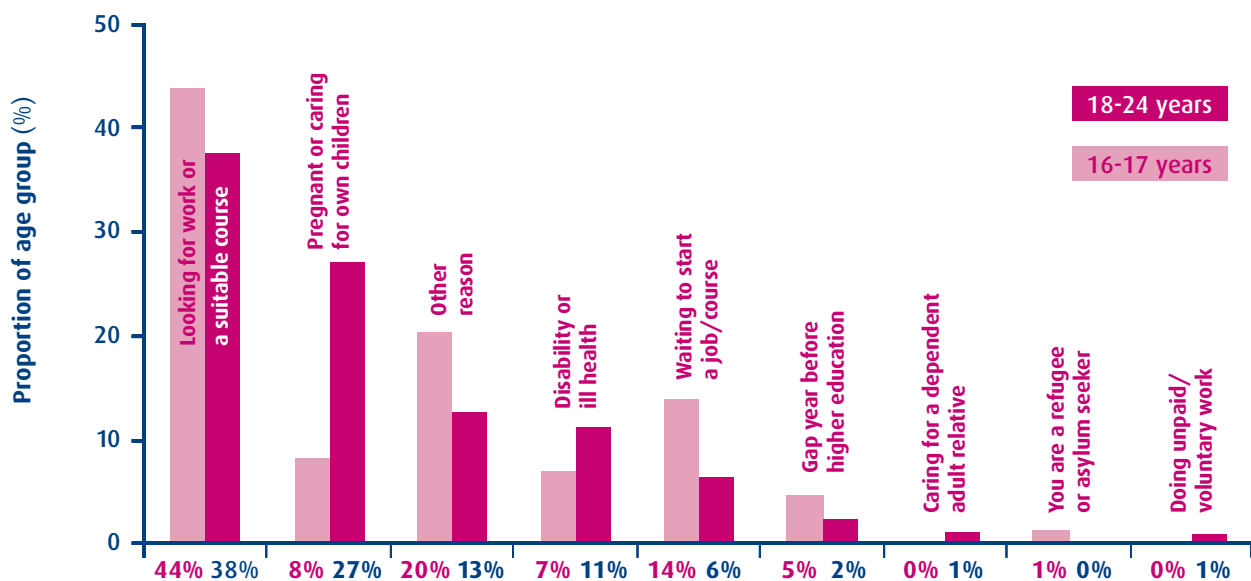
Figure 5 Labour market status of 16-17 year olds not in full time education (levels, thousands)²⁶



“In the future, every job will be a green job, contributing to varying degrees to continuous improvement of resource efficiency. Understanding the environmental impact of an occupation needs to be mainstreamed into education and training systems.”

European Union, 2010²⁷

Figure 6 Main reasons young people are not in education, employment or training²⁸



The role of the environment in building young people’s employment chances

Equipping young people for jobs in a green economy can give them access to a greater number of career choices. Using environment-focused training and job opportunities to help young people into employment, especially the most disaffected, complements current approaches to reducing the number of young people who are NEET. The more practical nature of these courses may appeal to those young people who learn through doing and do not engage well with classroom-based learning or a typical office environment. Both these approaches can provide real-life situations for learning that can develop personal responsibility and enable a young person to feel a valued part of their community.

There are two key opportunities:

- Developing skills for a green economy.
- Enabling young people who are NEET to access environment focused training and job opportunities, including those with environmental accreditation and awards.



“The study of their own local environment and lives can motivate young people to enjoy practising skills of writing, reading, drawing, measuring, calculating, designing and public speaking through approaches that make learning relevant and applied.”

Chawla²⁹

Skills for a green economy

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, green jobs are those within “agricultural, manufacturing, research and development and service activities that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality”.³⁰ This definition may well need to broaden as the transition to a low-carbon economy increasingly affects all sectors of the economy, to the point where the majority of jobs have a green component.^{31,32}

It is predicted there will be more green jobs in future and they will require different skills to those required in traditional industries.³³ In certain industries the jobs may have low barriers to entry with progression through on the job training.³⁴ An Institute for Public Policy Research report calling for the creation of ‘sector specific low-carbon career ladders’, identifies construction and manufacturing as sectors that are likely to offer ‘green jobs’ with low and intermediate occupational levels.³⁵

In terms of low-carbon economic activity, the UK is currently ranked sixth largest in the world. Valued at £112 billion in 2008-09,³⁶ low-carbon industries accounted for

“We’ve got a real opportunity to drive the green economy to have green jobs, green growth, and make sure that we have our share of the industries of the future.”

David Cameron

14 May 2010³⁷

approximately 910,000 jobs (see Figures 7 and 8), with a growth in market value of 4.3 per cent between 2007-08 and 2008-09. The Local Government Association estimates the potential for 20,000 new jobs in home energy efficiency and that we need to promote a “green pathway out of recession.”³⁸ A Government-commissioned study by Innovas predicts an estimated 400,000 jobs by 2015 in the sectors that will contribute to reducing Britain’s greenhouse gas emissions.³⁹ These all indicate significant numbers of new jobs across the adult population. However, it is likely that these are minimum figures, as other new opportunities could fit a wider definition of green jobs, including those that will be created to enable us to adapt to climate change.

Figure 7 Employment in the Low Carbon and Environmental Goods and Services (LCEGS) sector, 2007-8⁴⁰

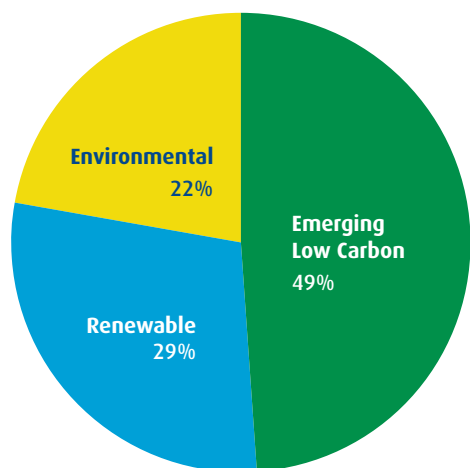
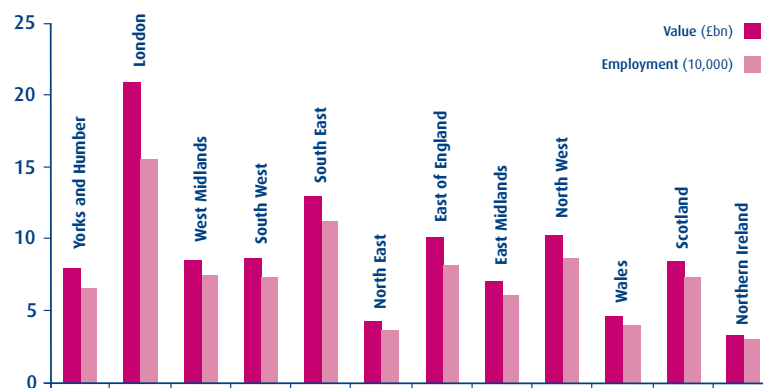


Figure 8 UK LCEGS sector value and employment by region, 2007-8



In its consultation on skills for a low carbon economy, Government identified the need to get more young people interested in low-carbon careers, skills and qualifications.⁴¹ It stressed the need to increase uptake of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and provide better access to information and guidance for young people. To this end a consortium project led by the Eden Project will enable 5,000 young people to experience environmental learning visits and green work placements.⁴² Another programme, delivered by Groundwork, offers unemployed young people temporary work that trains and provides them with the skills and qualifications to install 'retrofit' energy efficiency products to existing housing.⁴³

Carefully targeted investment in energy security, low-carbon infrastructures and ecological protection could yield three major benefits: jobs and economic recovery in the short-term; energy security and technological innovation in the medium-term; and a more sustainable future for our children in the long-term.⁴⁴ A survey of young people's views on behalf of v (the national young volunteers' service) found that 68 per cent believed it was fairly or very important for them to work for a socially responsible organisation, and 36 per cent would be very or fairly interested in a career related to climate changes issues.⁴⁵

Environment-focused opportunities for young people who are NEET

Programmes with an environmental focus can develop young people's skills and provide accreditation, whilst leading to more positive attitudes about future engagement with work. The Groundwork 'Dig It' programme teaches young people who are NEET landscaping skills over a six-week course giving them an OCN Level 1 accreditation. Participants demonstrate greater confidence, timekeeping, leadership qualities, perseverance, motivation and tolerance.⁴⁶

Evaluation of a woodland-survival skills course Warwickshire Children and Voluntary Service ran with Groundwork for young people who are NEET, found they gained more than just measureable skills.⁴⁹ As well as developing their confidence, leadership skills, and perseverance, they became more motivated and tolerant of their environment, staff and each other, as well as learning to live away from their families and create their own entertainment.

Ofsted report that the best initiatives for young people who are NEET are those that provide them with the opportunity to learn in environments that are very different from their experiences at school.⁴⁷ There is also strong evidence that involving young people in outdoor activities in school, such as gardening and tree planting, can contribute to young people's learning, with improvements in attention and achievement, social behaviour and relationships.⁴⁸

Environment-based programmes can reduce costs to society, as demonstrated by the BTCV, an environmental volunteering charity. Of 8,000 people who took part in the BTCV's employment programme over one year, almost 2,000 of these gained full-time employment after the course finished. They report that this resulted in over £20 million of increased earnings and a reduction in benefits of £5 million, which they calculate as a social return of £3.50

for every £1 they invested in the programme. Over the course of 15 years, if these people stay in employment the social return will increase, so every £1 BTCV invest could generate £15.⁵⁰

Two gardening projects have been shown to reduce offending rates. *Mow and Grow*, a group of independent companies working with local authorities, provide vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, including young offenders, with gardening skills and qualifications to enable them to start a career in horticulture. The young

people are supported by the Pupil Referral Unit and Young Offenders Team to enable them to address other barriers they may have to participation, for example, anger management.⁵¹ They report the reoffending rate following a short custodial sentence is 59.7 per cent, whereas the reoffending rate following a community sentence with *Mow & Grow* is 37.9 per cent.⁵² Derbyshire County Council runs a gardening project, *Grow 2 Grow*, targeting young people at risk of negative behaviours in their county. It is credited with youth offending dropping from 1,500 young people in 2007-2008 to 1,100 in 2008-2009.⁵³

***Bikes 4 All* – Groundwork Leicester**

Excluded young people recycle bicycles in alternative education provision



© Samantha Ayre – Bikes 4 All

***Bikes 4 All* is a community bike enterprise that recycles bicycles for resale. The project provides opportunities for young people excluded from mainstream education through a partnership with the Alternative Provision Team at Leicester City Council. It aims to provide young people with core numeracy and literacy skills, as well as accreditation to enable them to reengage with their own education or move on to training or employment.**

The project offers young people progression, starting with literacy and numeracy training. Working on new bicycles, the aim is for the young people to achieve certification in NVQ Level 1 City and Guilds Cycle Maintenance and Repair. Eighty-five per cent of young people achieve the Level 1 certificate. Those choosing to continue can progress to the Level 2.

The participants on the project are supported by mentors from the City Council Alternative Provision Team. They provide coaching and counselling in relation to the individuals' behaviour and home or family setting. The mentors also support the college entry process and link with Connexions to provide wider advice and guidance services.

The *Bikes 4 All* youth inclusion project allows the young people to reengage in their learning. The service providers have found excluded students offered a more practical and 'real life' experience through vocational learning, rather than classroom based learning, had a higher level of motivation and engagement, as well as improved attendance.

***Moving On* – Renfrewshire, Action for Children**

Young men make positive changes in their lives on release from prison



© Action for Children

Action for Children Youth Services in Scotland run a voluntary project for young males aged 16-21 years who are in custody or have recently left prison. It aims to reduce their offending behaviour, improve their physical and mental wellbeing and relationships with others, and enable them to progress through education, training or employment.

Participation is voluntary and requires the individual to agree to a personal action plan, which provides support for personal issues, personal development, and progression. Two of the options offered to support personal development are: environmental projects in the community; and, a week-long residential course involving outdoor learning.

The environmental *Challenge Projects* in the community help to build a range of skills. These include communication, planning, budgeting, manual handling, employability and social skills.

They also help build confidence and self-esteem. One *Challenge Project* involved a team of six young people undertaking a landscaping project at a local care home. The participants managed the whole process, from development to delivery. As a project proceeds, participants build a portfolio of evidence that can be shown to prospective employers to demonstrate experience and competence.

Outdoor learning is part of a structured programme of activities on the residential course. It contributes to developing motivation, confidence and personal and social skills. The course aims to increase soft skills and progress the young people to employment.

The engagement rate for *Moving On* is very high – 92 per cent. Of the current population of the young offender's institute, 88 per cent are serving their second sentence. Of those who go through the *Moving On* programme 72 per cent do not return to prison on new charges.

Enabling progress at a local level

Long-term, all young people can benefit from being supported to develop the skills required to meet the specific needs of employers in a green economy, and be able to minimise the use of energy and resources within any form of employment. In the current economic climate, particular focus needs to be given to supporting young people not in education, employment or training, especially those who may face additional challenges to gaining employment

long-term, such as young offenders. The environment can be used as a productive context in which to support the development of basic skills for employability in young people, and can yield qualifications and skills of value to the green economy. Provision should be targeted at those who have disengaged from classroom-based learning and who may prefer to engage in practical, hands-on learning.

Proposal 1a

Ensure young people are prepared for the green economy

The ability of young people to gain employment in the green economy need not be left to chance. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects have a particular role to play in driving green innovation and will be invaluable to employers seeking to remain competitive in a fast-changing landscape. Schools and colleges could make these exciting and appealing options for all young people through offering a range of academic and vocational STEM qualifications with varying entry levels. They can also encourage young people to acquire specific green skills, such as energy efficiency, waste management and recycling, sustainable travel, and social responsibility, through the provision of activities across the

curriculum, campus and community that develop their sustainable schools practice.⁵⁴ Careers services and information, advice and guidance providers can support young people through providing information on what green career options are available, how they can be accessed (including through apprenticeships or vocational routes requiring lower entry levels that may be particularly suitable for young people who are NEET), and the further opportunities to which they could lead. Businesses and charities with interests in the green agenda also have an opportunity to support young people through offering apprenticeships and on the job training in an increasing range of sectors that support the green economy.

Proposal 1b

Use the environment to help young people into long-term employment

Environmental opportunities for young people who are NEET, such as gardening, woodland management, or bicycle maintenance, offer practical routes to learning and enable participants to feel they are making a valued contribution to their community. Land-based programmes also offer mental health benefits through green exercise (see next chapter) and are a particularly effective way to develop basic skills for employability in disaffected young people. Local authorities, schools, careers advice centres, pupil referral units, and Jobcentre Plus have the opportunity to work alongside

environmental and community organisations to offer such structured schemes to young people, for example, as a form of targeted early intervention and as part of alternative provision. Accreditation should be an integral part of these programmes. Awards such as the ASDAN,⁵⁵ John Muir Award,⁵⁶ and Duke of Edinburgh's Award⁵⁷ encourage young people to explore their local environment, contribute to their community and develop their skills; whilst programmes providing level 1 qualifications can build young people's transferable skills and open up career choices.

3

Resilience, health and behaviour

Enabling young people to deal with unknown challenges as they arise, through improving their mental and physical health, and the way they behave.

The issue: young people's physical and mental health

Levels of childhood obesity have risen by over ten per cent the last ten years. In 2008, 16.8 per cent of boys and 15.2 per cent of girls aged 2-15 years were classed as obese.⁵⁸ It is predicted that by 2050, 25 per cent of children under 16 in Britain could be obese.⁵⁹ Obesity costs the NHS an estimated £1 billion per year, with indirect costs to the UK economy of £2.3 billion.⁶⁰ If current trends continue, obesity is predicted to rise further, with costs to the NHS rising

to £9.7 billion by 2050, with the wider costs to society estimated at £49.9 billion (at today's prices).⁶¹

The quality of a place strongly influences how safely and enjoyably young people can travel about under their own means and find positive things to do, which in turn affects their physical activity, health, and social interactions with different sections of the community.

Figure 9 Forecast trend in the proportion of adults and children who are overweight and obese, to 2050⁶²

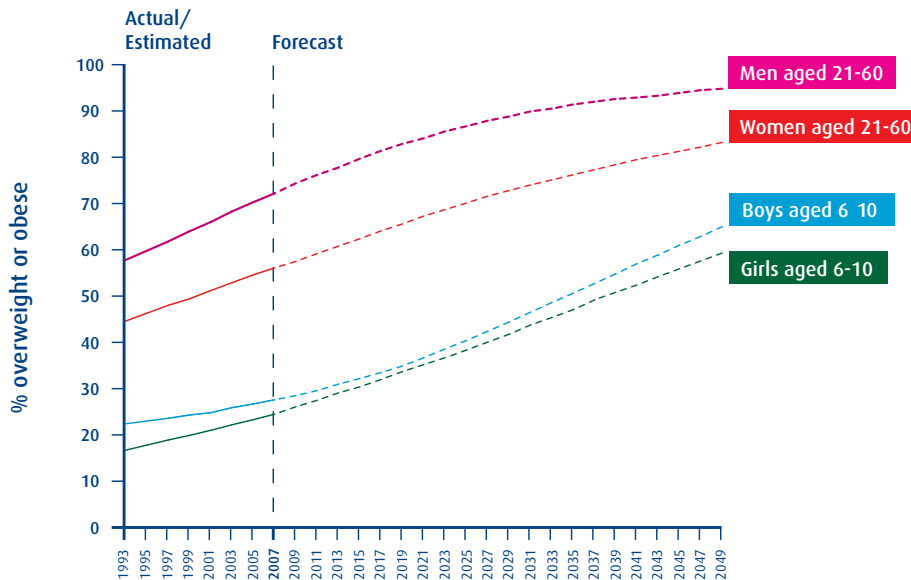
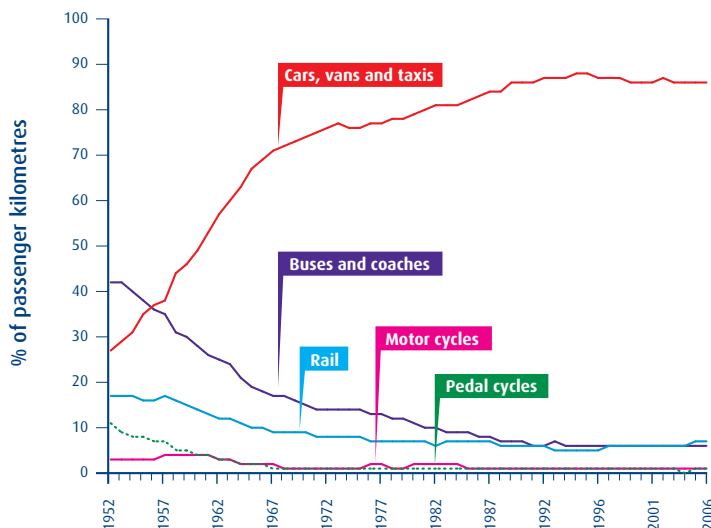


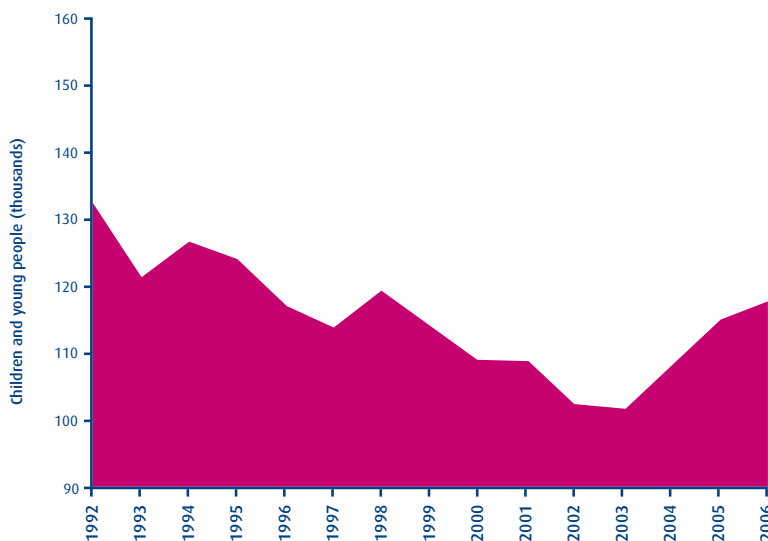
Figure 10 Passenger transport by mode (billion passenger km) 1952 to 2006



Five per cent of young people commit half of all youth crime. Their actions can take a heavy toll on their communities, affecting the physical appearance of an area through littering and vandalism, and eroding the community's sense of confidence and safety through intimidation and abuse. There are approximately 100,000

10-17 year olds entering the criminal justice system for the first time each year and 110,000 families identified as having children at risk of becoming prolific offenders.⁶³ Providing early intervention for just one in ten young offenders could save over £100 million annually.⁶⁴

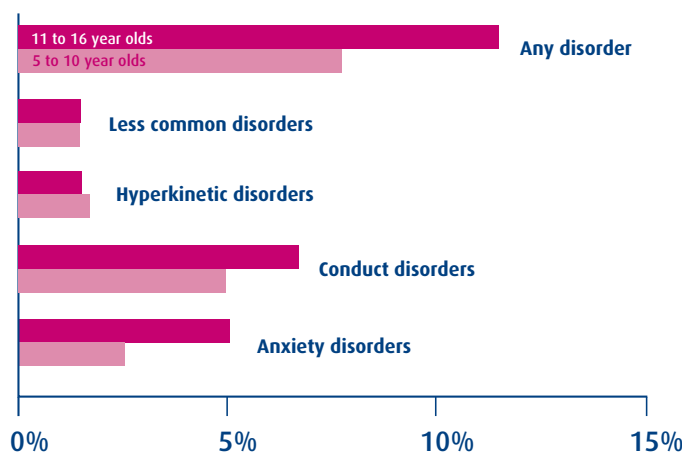
Figure 11 Children and young people cautioned, reprimanded, warned or sentenced for indictable offences, 1992 to 2006⁶⁵



Young people's mental health and psychological wellbeing play a key role in their personal and social development. This includes their ability to enjoy life, survive challenges and maintain positive wellbeing and self-esteem – sometimes referred to as resilience, the ability to recover from challenges.^{66,67} Developing resilience in young people is particularly important in times of rapid change where habits and assumptions cannot be expected to hold. The 21st century is very likely to fit this description, with issues such as population growth, migration, poverty, resource

scarcity and climate change all contributing to uncertainty. As many as ten per cent of children and young people have a clinically diagnosed mental disorder, ranging from anxiety and depression to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to disorders characterised by socially unacceptable behaviour.⁶⁸ By age 28, the costs to society (for example, involvement in crime, being unemployed or poorer general health) for those who had troubled behaviour as children, are ten times higher than for those with no problems.⁶⁹

Figure 12 Prevalence of mental disorders by age and sex in Britain, 2004⁷⁰



The role of the environment in building young people's resilience

Our previous report *Every Child's Future Matters*⁷¹ highlights the importance of the quality of the built environment to children and young people's wellbeing. Involving young people in improving their local area, especially in planned changes, for example, to enhance road safety, active travel, public transport, accessibility of green spaces, availability of places to go, and personal safety, can develop their sense of responsibility for their community, whilst improving their quality of life. The use of low-cost programmes that engage young people in green exercise and active travel can improve their mental and physical health, as well as developing wider skills, with green care an effective option to support the most challenging young people.

There are three key opportunities:

- **Involving young people in shaping the places in which they live**
- **Enabling young people to travel actively (walking and cycling)**
- **Supporting physical activity in the natural environment, including through green exercise and green care.**



*Evidence of Impact of Sustainable Schools, 2010*⁷²

“There is a large body of research that illustrates the importance of environmental experience and contact with nature in childhood to promote children’s physical and mental health and wellbeing.”

© SDC

The place in which young people live

Public outdoor places are important to young people⁷³ and young people's needs should be considered in their design.⁷⁴ Chawla identifies the benefits of involving young people in planning: “young people have insight, creativity and thoughts to contribute to the shaping of their cities and towns. At the same time, they learn the habits and practices of democratic government and environmental care.”⁷⁵ Since its launch in 2009, 150 projects have used the Cobe *Spaceshaper* tool for use with 9-14 year olds.⁷⁶

There is extensive literature on young people's relationship with place, especially in relation to risk and safety.⁷⁷ Perceived risks, such as traffic and threat of crime can stop them from going out or taking part in community activities;⁷⁸ and the road environment can influence

physical activity levels.⁷⁹ Pretty et al showed availability of open space and leisure provision can impact positively on young people's physical activity, whilst increased road density, or the presence of litter and graffiti can have a negative impact.⁸⁰ They also noted the link between health and green space, and reduced recorded crime on urban estates with the “presence of nature”.

Young people can be involved in local road improvement planning to improve safety, for example, *Streets Ahead on Safety*, a project by Birmingham City Council.⁸¹ Improvements in road safety through traffic calming measures can reduce collisions and deaths;⁸² one study found a 42 per cent reduction in crashes following the introduction of 20 mile per hour zones.⁸³

Cost, availability, reliability and safety are reasons why young people may not use buses.⁸⁴ Twenty-five per cent of 16-24 year olds have not applied for a job due to transport problems,⁸⁵ whilst 52 per cent of 16-24 year olds are more likely to have difficulty accessing places compared to 32 per cent of others.⁸⁶ Young people that we engaged with as part of this project identified public transport, especially bus links, as something they wanted to improve through free or cheap bus travel for young people and increased frequency.⁸⁷ They thought this could increase young people's confidence and employment chances through greater independence, making living in rural areas more affordable, and contributing to reducing carbon emissions.

"We feel that prevention can hold the key to dealing with anti-social behaviour. Activities like cycling can offer a diversion away from negative ways of behaving, particularly if the young people are involved in shaping the activity themselves. In the currently sensitive environment around levels of public spending, modest investments in *Bike Club* projects can provide excellent value for money compared to the costs of dealing with these issues later through the police and the courts."⁷⁰

Sarah Troke, Manager – Bike Club UK

Active travel (walking and cycling)

Enabling young people to travel actively directly helps them to lead healthier lifestyles. Brunton et al identify two approaches: "the extension and improvement of cycle networks" and "the creation of tailored marketing messages for subsets of children, young people and parents."⁸⁹

Vandergrift and Yoked found young people are more likely to walk to work and school if they live in 'dense neighbourhoods' compared to those who live in areas with the most 'urban sprawl'.⁹⁰ The increase in developed land was seen to limit transport options, so the car seemed the only possibility. Rosenberg et al found a relationship

between the 'walkability' of a neighbourhood environment and levels of physical activity, with perceptions of risk and fear of crime impacting on young people's ability to participate.⁹¹

Activities, such as walking, can offer cheap and accessible routes⁹² to getting young people more physically active and leading healthier lifestyles. A small pilot project run by Action for Children and the Ramblers Association encouraged families and young people to take part in walks in their local area, leading to them feeling more positively about walking.⁹³

Physical activity in the natural environment: green exercise

Young people have considerably less contact with nature than previous generations; a fact described by Pyle as an 'extinction of experience'.⁹⁴ A number of studies demonstrate that exercise in nature can influence behavioural choice⁹⁵ and free play in natural environments can increase social interactions and promote learning aptitude.⁹⁶ Pretty et al report that green exercise, defined as "activity in green places (in the presence of nature)" is predicted to be good for health, and can foster social bonds and influence behavioural choices.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Bell et al report evidence that 'neighbourhood greenness' is inversely

associated with body mass index in children and young people, and that promotion and preservation of green space could be a means of addressing childhood obesity.⁹⁹

Exposure to nature can lead to positive mental health outcomes.¹⁰⁰ Bird highlights the links between mental health and the natural environment.¹⁰¹ He found over 100 studies supporting the role of the natural environment in 'attention restoration' (when indirect attention allows concentration to be held with little or no effort, allowing the brain to restore for more direct attention usage),¹⁰² as it provided the most effective location for promoting indirect attention. Research by Mind, the mental health charity, into the benefits of 'eco-therapy', found evidence to support the development of existing treatment options that include a natural approach.¹⁰³

"Spending time in a natural setting enables participants to access those aspects of their self that may elude them in more conventional personal or therapeutic sessions."⁶⁴

Nature, Childhood, Health and Life Pathways
Interdisciplinary Centre for Environment and Society
University of Essex 2009

Contact with nature can help children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Faber et al note a study finding: "children undertaking outdoor activities in nature appear

to improve symptoms by 30 per cent compared to urban outdoor activities and three fold compared to the indoor environment."¹⁰⁴ Bird also reports that higher exposure to nature can reduce stress levels and increase self-worth in children and young people experiencing a high number of stressful life events.¹⁰⁵

Outdoor learning can improve attitudes, beliefs, self-perceptions, interpersonal social skills, and memory

creation and retention.¹⁰⁶ Barrett and Greenaway report that "small group participation in enjoyable outdoor adventure appears to improve individual socialisation which in turn may assist conflict resolution. Shared participation in challenging adventure activities can result in improved understanding, trust and communication between young participants and between young people and adult staff."¹⁰⁷

2XL – Brathay Trust

Urban young people reduce youth crime and develop leadership

Case study 3



© Brathay Trust

The Brathay 2XL programme is run in partnership with a number of London boroughs. It supports young people involved in gang activity, anti-social, or criminal behaviour to develop their aspirations and become reengaged with their education through structured activities that start with Brathay building up its local knowledge of the community through working in partnership with local agencies. Young people who have been through the programme previously recruit their peers from

within the community to enable relationships to be built.

In the first fifteen-week phase the young people go on a three-day intensive residential. This involves challenging, outdoor experiences, such as scrambling up a mountain stream and going on a self-planned mountain journey. These activities develop their social skills, sense of responsibility, confidence and self-belief, and provide a sense of personal achievement.

The residential creates the space required for the young people to reflect on their current situation and aspirations to create a positive vision for their future. Through supporting each other during the activities, it enables them to develop trust and unite with other young people from different areas, something that may not be possible when in their own communities.

The young people receive support once back in their communities to enable them to achieve the goals they developed. Many go on to participate in the second phase which emphasises leadership and involves a second residential experience. One participant said: "you learn to support each other; it taught me to be a leader, to keep focused and to achieve my goals."

Physical activity in the natural environment: green care

Green care describes a range of therapeutic interventions based in the natural environment.¹⁰⁸ One type, wilderness therapy, has been shown to improve the lives of young people with drug addiction and challenging behaviour by reducing rates of depression and attempted suicide,

and improving leadership, time management and social skills.¹⁰⁹ During *TurnAround*, a project that uses elements of wilderness therapy to help young people at risk in social care in Essex, 'negative events' reduced and participants displayed less anti-social behaviour.¹¹⁰

Care farming, another form of green care, can lead to “increased self-esteem, enhanced wellbeing and beneficial changes in mood, an increase in self-confidence, trust in other people, calmness, formation of a work habit and the development of social skills and a sense of personal responsibility.”¹¹¹ Within the UK, over half of care farms provide a service for disaffected young people.¹¹² Hine et al found a significant increase in self-esteem and a significant decrease in ‘total mood disturbance’ of participants after spending time on a care farm, alongside a reduction in anger, confusion, depression, tension and fatigue. They urge offender management services to “recognise the potential of care farming to deliver both mental health and employment dividends to offenders and ex-offenders.”¹¹³

Forest Schools, an outdoor learning programme, can improve participants’ confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing, as well as developing their motivation to learn and providing a sense of ownership of their local environment.¹¹⁴ It has been shown to improve social skills, communication and language.¹¹⁵ It typically takes place in a woodland setting with a high ratio of adults to pupils, freedom to explore using multiple senses, and regular contact with participants over a significant period of time. Participants can include young people with emotional and behavioural issues; O’Brien and Murray found some children in their study “displayed changes in behaviour that were wholly or partly attributable to their involvement in *Forest School*.”¹¹⁶

***Forest School* – Brighton and Hove Youth Offending Trust, ru-ok? and the Sussex Wildlife Trust**

Young offenders and substance misusers experience outdoor learning



© Forest Schools

The *Forest School* approach engages young people in their learning through positive outdoor experiences. It is used by the Youth Offending Team and ru-ok? (a specialist substance misuse service) in Brighton and Hove, to offer a different type of intervention. The project was delivered in partnership with the local wildlife trust over ten

weeks in woodland at a local park. The aim was to engage the young people in diversionary activities that gave them new experiences of the local environment, whilst building their confidence and self-esteem.

The sessions appeared on the surface to be informal, as participants chose their own level of engagement with activities, including fire-making and cooking. They were given responsibility and training for the use of tools, such as fixed blade knives and bow saws. As the weeks progressed the activities became more guided by the young people themselves.

During the course of the project there were observed changes in the behaviour of the group. Parents reported improvements in their wellbeing and there was consistent attendance. There were also no major incidents of aggression or dangerous behaviour.

The approach allowed the young people to develop confidence and learn how to work co-operatively and independently. The focus on the environment, rather than on self-improvement, also gave the young people the emotional space they required to become self-managing and to be able to develop relationships in a neutral environment.

Enabling progress at a local level

Environmental factors can have a marked effect on the development, behaviour, wellbeing and resilience of young people. It is important they are consulted on what they like and do not like about the places where they live to improve the quality of their local environment, and that they have opportunities to develop their mental and physical wellbeing through time spent in green spaces and the

natural environment. Our proposals accord with the findings of our recent review of health inequalities, *Sustainable development: The key to tackling health inequalities*, which calls for changes in policy on food, transport, green space, and the built environment to address persistent inequalities in problems affecting society, including young people, such as mental health and obesity.¹¹⁷

Proposal 2a

Involve young people in shaping the places in which they live

Local authorities should consider the impacts of their planning and transport decisions on the health and wellbeing of all young people. They should consult with them on an ongoing basis, including through targeted youth support services to reach disaffected young people and through local youth parliaments or committees, to ensure their range of needs are properly taken into account. This applies to existing residential areas and streets and to new

developments alike, with a view to giving young people the positive, healthy, green places they need to flourish. Through improved public transport links, particularly in rural areas, local authorities and private providers could afford young people greater access to opportunities, especially if combined with greater concessions, possibly linked to employment and training, for young people up to the age of 18.

Proposal 2b

Enable young people to travel actively (walk and cycle)

In a car-dominated country, young people require the infrastructure and environment to allow them to safely travel actively to the typical destinations of school, work, services, shops, recreation and friends in their local area. In practice this means local authorities creating high quality, attractive and safe walking and cycling routes, remediation of

'unsafe' junctions and crime hot spots, and long-term promotion of active travel from schools, local authorities, parents and community organisations. Success in this area could tackle poor health and obesity, reduce congestion, traffic danger and pollution, and lead to greater association of young people (and social capital) in their communities.

Proposal 2c

Enable young people to participate in green exercise

A more universal offer of regular physical activity in green places, both in and outside of school, would benefit young people's mental and physical health and could engage them in improving their community. Schools can offer this through greater use of playing fields and outdoor spaces for activities, such as growing, walking, and outdoor learning. Whilst providers of informal services for young people, such as youth groups, can support young

people in undertaking similar activities through using the outdoor spaces around their youth centres, and local green spaces and parks. In linking up with local 'friends of' groups or environmental organisations, all providers of services for young people can offer them practical activities in the natural environment, for example, environmental volunteering or community improvement projects (see next chapter).

Proposal 2d

Use green care to rehabilitate disaffected young people

Structured environmental therapeutic programmes, such as green care and outdoor adventure or learning, can be part of holistic rehabilitation support delivered by youth offending teams and targeted support services for young people, both within and outside schools. These programmes provide the young people with the opportunity to reflect on, deal with and overcome the issues that prevent them

from progressing, whilst helping them to develop relationships with positive role models and engage in practical activities that build their transferable skills. Teachers and support workers can be trained to deliver programmes such as *Forest Schools* locally as part of early intervention programmes or alternative provision, with suitable locations being identified by local environmental organisations.

4

Personal responsibility in young people

**Giving young people a
sense of purpose, worth
and achievement through
showing how their actions
make a difference**

The issue: disengagement of young people from civic society

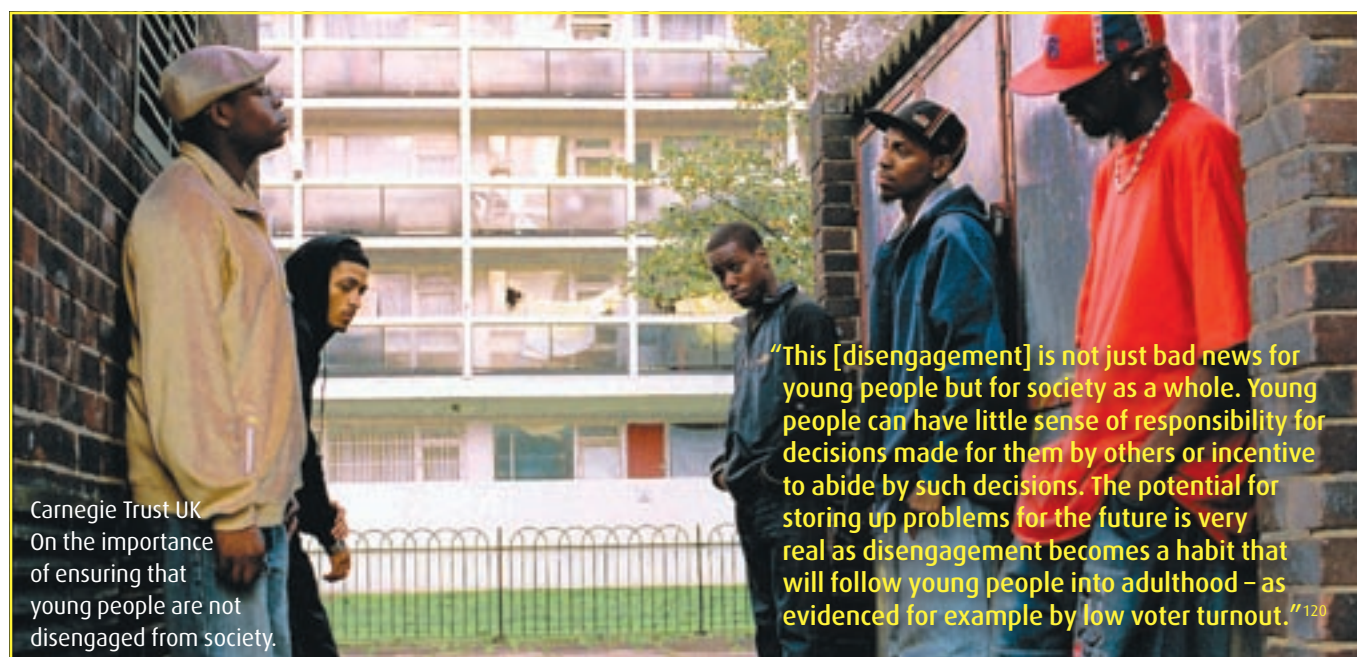
Young people aged 16-25 are less likely than adults aged 26-74 to be involved in acts of charity or citizenship¹¹⁸ or in civic engagement overall (33 per cent compared to 45-54 per cent).¹¹⁹ They are less likely to vote (above age 18), less likely to be involved in their local community and less likely to undertake formal voluntary work.¹²⁰ Levels of civic engagement and volunteering by young people aged 16-25 have shown a small yearly decline between 2007-08 and 2009-10, whilst civic participation by adults has decreased overall from 38 per cent in 2001 to 34 per cent in 2009-2010,¹²¹ with those in managerial and professional occupations more likely to be involved in civic participation, than those who have never worked or are long-term unemployed.¹²² Whilst 64 per cent of young people feel they can influence decisions affecting their school, only 33 per cent believe they are able to influence decisions affecting their local area,¹²³ and only 14 per cent of 15 and 16 year olds feel they have enough say in decisions that affect them.¹²⁴

Disengagement can lead to young people engaging in anti-social and negative behaviours. Anti-social behaviour costs the public £3.4 billion a year and is a major issue in some of the country's most deprived or disadvantaged communities.¹²⁵ To try to tackle this acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs) and anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) were introduced in 1999. Between 1999 and 2007, approximately 6,000 young people aged 10-17 years were issued with ASBOs (mostly young males); just over 1,000 young people received them in 2007.¹²⁶

"My worst future would be a loss of agency or purpose. I would be alone, secluded from other people. I would have a job that doesn't satisfy me, and feel like I wasn't living up to my potential. I would be constantly worried about how I affect the world around me, but unable to do anything about it."

A young adult participant in the Global Survey on Sustainable Lives, UNEP (2010) Taskforce on Sustainable Lives

Participation of young people in community projects contributes to improved social capital, or the sense of shared purpose produced by the interaction of people in a given community. This has been shown to impact positively on health, educational achievement, employment outcomes, and lower crime levels.¹²⁷ Once young people understand themselves as morally committed to and engaged in building civil society, they can have a sense of agency in their own healthy development and in the positive enhancement of other people and of society.¹²⁸ Demos recommend a 'life-cycle' approach to getting young people engaged in civic service that starts in school and continues with options to take part in full-time volunteering between the ages of 16-18 with financial support for those who will find it most challenging to participate.¹²⁹



Carnegie Trust UK
On the importance of ensuring that young people are not disengaged from society.

"This [disengagement] is not just bad news for young people but for society as a whole. Young people can have little sense of responsibility for decisions made for them by others or incentive to abide by such decisions. The potential for storing up problems for the future is very real as disengagement becomes a habit that will follow young people into adulthood – as evidenced for example by low voter turnout."¹²⁰

© Brathay Trust

The role of the environment in building young people's responsibility

Many young people care deeply about their environment and there are various issues relating to their local area that they would like to change.^{131,132} During this project we held a session with young participants in a national leadership programme¹³³ to discover what characteristics they would associate with a 'good place to grow up'. Their responses were consistent with the findings of previous surveys of this kind:¹³⁴ having green space around them; socialising and being close to friends and family; accessible local shops and produce; schools located close to home; places for young people to be creative or active; safe streets and places to spend time; good public transport; and a sense that their voice is heard.¹³⁵ They also identified what they would like to change in their communities, prioritising safety and crime prevention, facilities and education for young people, and public transport. They identified solutions involving the whole community, and wider policy changes that would make it easier to improve their local places.

The environment is clearly not the only context in which young people's sense of personal responsibility can be developed, but it is an attractive option given the near-perpetual environmental challenges facing so many areas, from litter and pollution to green space and climate change. The approaches presented in this chapter are both voluntary in nature, one involving structured volunteering programmes that can provide stepping stones to improved health and employment; the other enabling young people to participate in community-based projects to take action on local issues they care about.

There are two key opportunities:

- **Engaging young people in structured environmental volunteering.**
- **Building personal responsibility through local environmental action.**

Structured environmental volunteering

For young people, environmental volunteering can impact positively on behaviour, attitudes, knowledge and skills, with shifts noticeable in perception of the value of team work, and how individual actions can combine into larger effects.¹³⁶ BTCV report that nine out of ten young people taking part in their volunteering programme learnt something new, with 98 per cent reporting they would like to repeat the experience.¹³⁷ They estimate every £1 they invest in their *People and Places* programme generates £4 through reduced crime, improved leisure and increased employment.

Environmental volunteering can be an effective way to integrate socially disadvantaged groups, including young people at risk. The voluntary and practical nature of the activity, and a sense of empowerment, can breed confidence, motivation, knowledge and skills.¹³⁸ A Kent-

based project involving asylum-seeking young people in conservation activities led to notable increases in self-esteem and confidence, as well as positively affecting the physical and mental health of the participants.¹³⁹ The young people also improved their English language skills and became better integrated into the community.

Leyshon acknowledges the need to ensure environmental volunteering for young people is focused on their personal and social development.¹⁴⁰ He recommends that providers of services for young people should work with environmental and community organisations from an early stage to ensure volunteering opportunities are structured to focus on developing young people's wider skills, such as leadership, management and coordination, alongside developing their environmental skills and knowledge.

IMPACT – Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside

Young people engage through conservation volunteering

Case study 5



© Lancashire Wildlife Trust

The IMPACT project, funded by v, provides volunteering opportunities for young people aged 16-25 years, especially those who may feel socially isolated or find it harder to enter employment. Training, especially linked to accreditation and awards, is an important element. Opportunities include part and full-time placements.

Part-time volunteering could include growing food, making films, practical conservation tasks, environmental art and photography. A volunteer co-ordinator provides support to part-time volunteers, including offering lifts from central locations to the volunteering location. They also send a text to participants each week to get a commitment to take part, helping to build the participants' time keeping skills.

The five-month full-time placements offer opportunities that could lead to employment in conservation, community engagement, youth work and centre development. One volunteer was in charge of developing a new volunteer group engaging 16-25 year olds in practical conservation activities. They planned the entire process, including advertising, running the sessions, risk assessing health and safety, and tool talks. The group they created responded positively, feeling proud of the positive changes they had made to their local area.

Through the placements, the young people develop transferable skills that can lead to further training, education or employment, including at the Wildlife Trust. This includes planning, budgeting and leadership skills, motivation, and a sense of achievement. A young people's steering group supports the placements, providing feedback and identifying training needs.

Building personal responsibility through local environmental action

Environmental projects can provide opportunities for communities to work together on joint aims through 'link-up' and 'link-in' methods that increase public-spiritedness.¹⁴¹ The *Eastfeast* initiative, which links-up young people, growers, food producers and allotment holders, culminates in a community feast. It has been shown to increase young people's confidence in making decisions about their own learning.¹⁴²

Ofsted found that when young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) participate in

practical and challenging community projects, such as site-clearing to establish allotments or redecorating buildings in their local area, they achieve a sense of self-worth through their involvement.¹⁴³ They also report findings from teachers that pupils respond well to practical activities that make a clear difference to their school and local community, in terms of their attitudes and behaviours.¹⁴⁴ A regeneration project in Manchester involved youth workers successfully engaging young people who had become 'devalued' (and therefore unlikely participants) in improving their local area.¹⁴⁵

Young Activists – Department for Education

Encouraging young people to become activists for sustainable development



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The Department for Education funded *Young Activists* programme created different models of engagement suitable for use by young people in different settings. It aimed to raise awareness and understanding of what sustainable development means locally and globally to empower young people to take action for change through positive activities that improve their local environment. Tools were developed by four partner organisations:¹⁴⁶

- **We Are What We Do:** uses the approach that everyday actions can change the world. Schools and youth groups can commit to doing some of

the 131 actions listed on the website. The actions increase understanding through fun statistics and facts about the impact of lots of people doing them. They provide materials and tools that enable young people to inspire others, through creating their own campaign.

- **Groundwork:** developed a project management tool, 'Changelt', for young people to use to take action and create change in the community. Uses "start it, plan it, do it, change it" approach. Helps young people make sense of what they are doing, why and how, for example, through looking at Fairtrade by making their own chocolate.
- **National Children's Bureau:** created the 'One Step, One World' challenge, including a charter developed by young people. Enables young people to realise they can take one step to create change, with the young people committing to 'a challenge' and leading it, for example, to organise and run a recycled fashion show.
- **Envision:** created an extra-curricular empowerment and enrichment programme for 14-19 year olds to support development of citizenship. Enables young people to identify issues that matter to them in their local area and develop a positive change project, for example, to create a garden at a hospital. They have guidance on how to create campaign materials.

The *Young Activists* programme aims to encourage young people to become activists for sustainable development in their communities.¹⁴⁷ Four partner organisations worked with young people to develop tools, which were shown to increase empowerment and confidence. The National Children’s Bureau reported 81 per cent of young people agreeing they could make a positive change in their community as a result of doing ‘the challenge’, and 85 per cent of practitioners agreeing it had improved the young people’s confidence. Groundwork reported a significant increase in four measures of participant’s empowerment: attitude, self-efficacy, knowledge and skills. They found some of the projects led to changes in both residents and young people’s attitudes towards each other, changing perceptions and contributing to cohesion.¹⁴⁸ The other partner organisations reported improved outcomes for young people in their emotional and social skills, employability, aspiration, sense of belonging, and understanding responsibility for their actions.

Young people can gain empathy, respect and responsibility through projects that encourage the development of critical thinking. *Global Youth Action*¹⁴⁹ for example, seeks

to enable young people to make connections between their personal, local and global environment, whilst Young Pioneers (a project run by young people for young people) aims to make it ‘cool to care’ through short courses on areas such as ‘stay safe’, ‘be healthy’ and ‘go green’. This helps tackle some of the core challenges young people face, whilst developing transferable skills that increase self-confidence, such as giving presentations, team working and listening.¹⁵⁰

Young people can direct their own involvement in community projects to improve their local environment. The *Green Youth Group for Swindon and Wiltshire* (GYGSAW) project was developed following a consultation by Wiltshire Assembly of Youth that found environmental activities should be more widely promoted to youth organisations and in youth work settings across the county.¹⁵¹ It led to a group of young people developing ‘Greengauge’, a self-assessment tool for use by youth groups to inspire and enable them to take action on environmental issues of interest to them no matter what the core purpose of their group. The scheme was successful, with at least fifteen groups having been ‘Greengauge’ certificated.

Global Youth Action – DEA

Young people explore and take action on the global issues that matter to them

DEA run the *Global Youth Action* project in partnership with local organisations to involve disadvantaged young people. In Somerset, the Centre for Global Learning and Development Education (GLADE) have been working with *Incredible Tuesdays*, a club for young people with special needs. The broad aims are to enable young people to learn about other countries and cultures through fun practical activities and to motivate them to take actions to make a difference.

The *Global Youth Action* programme uses a ‘3C’ approach:

- **Connect:** supporting young people to make connections between the personal, local and global on global issues that matter to them. ‘Incredible Tuesdays’ looked at links between Somerset and Africa, meeting African people to find out the differences and similarities between their lives and those of their African peers.

- **Challenge:** encouraging young people to challenge themselves and use critical thinking to be able to challenge others. The young people at *Incredible Tuesdays* challenged their own perceptions through meeting African people, leading to them changing their attitudes and believing all people should be treated the same.
- **Change:** supporting young people to take action and bring about positive change. *Incredible Tuesdays* decided they wanted their local supermarket to sell more Fairtrade chocolate, so they filled in and returned ‘To the Store Manager’ cards.

The project was felt to be a success on many levels. The young people developed their own personal agency through the actions they had taken and continued to take, such as buying Fairtrade, whilst they developed their transferable skills. By challenging their own prejudices and learning about other cultures, their values and attitudes towards others also changed.

Enabling progress at a local level

Supporting young people to take an active role in their local community through environmental volunteering or projects involving personal action can foster their sense of responsibility and belonging, whilst developing their transferable skills. Through targeting disaffected young people who may be engaged in anti-social behaviour or

at risk of offending, a range of community problems can be tackled at the same time as involving young people in improving their local area. Opportunities can be developed for young people through partnerships between service providers and local environmental and community organisations.

Proposal 3a

Provide of structured environmental volunteering for young people

Schools, local authorities, Jobcentre Plus and Connexions can work with local community and environmental organisations to establish structured environmental volunteering opportunities specifically for young people, catering for a range of abilities and offering variable time commitments. This would support the Government's ambition to nurture civic responsibility through the Big Society and, depending on the age groups involved, would

either prepare young people for involvement in the National Citizen Service, or provide them with follow-on opportunities to sustain their community contribution. Clearly such initiatives would need to be locally financed, including the costs incurred by the young people in participating, which would ideally be recompensed through a 'volunteering allowance'.

Proposal 3b

Enable young people to take part in local environmental action

All young people, especially the most disengaged, can be supported in their development of critical thinking skills and personal responsibility through programmes that enable them to identify and address issues in their local environment that they care about. The National Citizen Service provides a perfect opportunity to enable this, but other, year-round providers of services to young people can do likewise, for example local authority youth services, Youth Offending Teams, schools (including but not limited to alternative provision and behaviour

support units), youth groups, and voluntary and community organisations or business providers. There are a range of freely available tools, such as those produced by the Department for Education's Young Activists programme,¹⁵² which can be used by providers to guide young people through their own projects and campaigns. A 'Dragons-Den' style bidding process involving local business and community leaders could be used to engage young people, as happened with the original pilots for the National Citizen Service.¹⁵³

Conclusions and recommendations

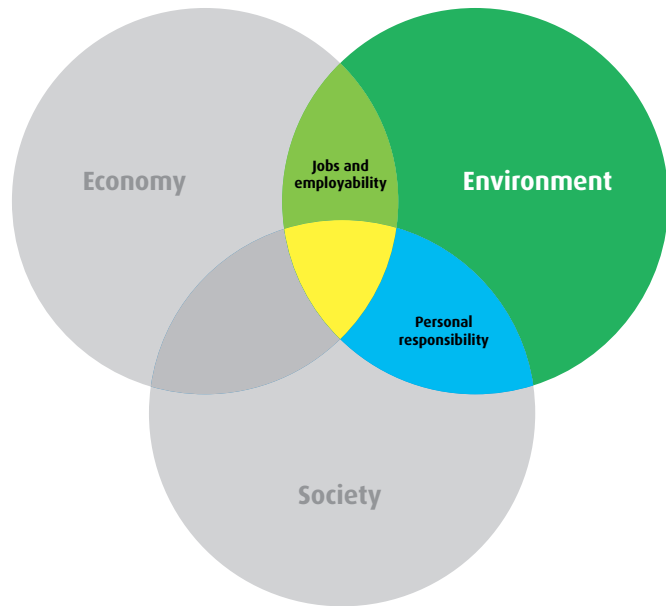
The evidence presented in this report validates the importance of including the third dimension of sustainable development – the environment – in policy and services for young people. Doing this has the potential to inspire powerful new approaches to tackling the problems that some young people experience and so improve their quality of life.

Our proposed green thread through policy and practice offers the prospect of more resilient, healthier young people who are well prepared to be citizens of a sustainable community. It achieves this through ensuring important connections are made between environmental, economic and social outcomes, as illustrated in Figure 13.

Clearly, there is nothing to stop local authorities, voluntary and community organisations and businesses adopting these approaches now without waiting for central authorisation – this is exactly the kind of local leadership anticipated by the Big Society. The proposals that we have set out in previous sections provide many pointers to help them do so.

However, awareness of these opportunities is far from universal at present and, for a breakthrough to occur, greater leadership from central Government is required to ensure sustainable development is embedded across society.

Figure 13 How the environment can enhance social and economic outcomes for young people



To that end we offer a small number of strategic recommendations below both for policy makers and those commissioning and providing services for young people that would encourage more universal uptake of good practice.

Recommendations for Government

These are primarily relevant to the work of the Department for Education. They also have relevance to a number of Government departments whose work has a direct impact

on young people's lives including the Cabinet Office, Ministry of Justice, Home Office, Department of Health, and Department for Work and Pensions.

1. Run a green thread through policy

Major new policy ventures for young people have the opportunity to demonstrate an environmental dimension through all stages of their design and delivery.

In order to stimulate action at a local level, it is vital that national policy highlights the value of green skills and environmental activity to those involved with the commissioning and delivery of services for young people. The Prime Minister has said he wants this Government to be the 'greenest ever' and with programmes such as

the National Citizen Service there is a real opportunity to raise awareness of the benefits to young people and communities of positive environmental activities. We suggest there should be clear signalling of environmental opportunities in policy statements and communications with stakeholders, and integration of green thinking in commissioning guidance and quality standards for service providers. This signalling should also come through the work of the arms length bodies sponsored by Government departments to enable more direct support to service providers.

2. Expand green activity through social investment

By commissioning a robust analysis of the economic and social benefits of positive environmental activities for young people, Government can expedite service providers' access to social investment funds.

Access to funding can depend on providers and commissioners being able to demonstrate the impact of their proposals, particularly long-term financial savings. Within this report, due to the available research, the findings we present are mostly qualitative. To strengthen this evidence, and to enable clear advice to be given on

how to measure impact, a further analysis is required to determine the longer-term economic and social value arising from a green thread through policy and delivery. This could be done through economic modelling to quantify potential savings over a significant period, whilst enabling more immediate influence on decision-making in policy and service delivery. The study should explore the potential use of a social return on investment model¹⁵⁴ to pave the way for projects to become candidates for investment from sources such as the proposed Big Society Bank and social impact bonds.^{155,156}

Recommendations for commissioners and providers of services for young people

These are primarily relevant to a range of organisations working with or for young people including, but not limited to, local authority youth services, schools (including alternative provision and behavioural support units), pupil referral units, Youth Offending Teams, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, careers advice centres, youth groups, local community and environmental organisations, and business providers.

3. Empower the workforce and young people

Build the capacity of frontline staff to run an environmental dimension through their work with young people, especially to empower young people to develop personal responsibility, ensuring that workforce development, commissioning and national policy are coherent with this objective.

Frontline staff are responsible for building relationships and trust with young people, often in challenging settings, engaging them through their own passion and helping them to improve their lives. The idea of a green approach to service delivery will not be new to everyone working with young people, but many will lack first-hand experience of

how it can be developed and applied in practice. A short 'top tips' guidance document for the sector to support this has already been produced by Action for Children,¹⁵⁷ and there are further tools available for use with young people through the Department for Education's Young Activists programme.¹⁵⁸ However, to give this work direction, leaders of relevant services for young people should provide a clear message to frontline teams to build up their capacity in this area. This could be backed up with appropriate requirements in service specifications, facilitating join-up with other local service providers and partners, and enabling the sharing of good practice and appropriate training.

4. Focus on prevention

Schools and support services should offer environmental activities to all young people, both through their universal provision and through their targeted support for disaffected learners and learners with special educational needs.

Young people should be entitled to participate in structured environmental activities as a means of building their resilience and self-esteem, boosting their physical and mental health, improving their achievement and taking responsibility. Structured environmental activities, where a

clear purpose is given for undertaking them, can contribute to learning and achievement of qualifications and, where required, help to shift negative attitudes and behaviour, even in the most challenging young people. As the evidence in this report shows, incorporating these activities within alternative provision and behavioural support for learners (delivered for example by specialist support units in secondary schools or by pupil referral units) can enhance the quality of their provision, raise aspirations amongst young people and, most importantly, help to reduce the likelihood of more serious problems setting in.

5. Draw on expertise of voluntary and community organisations

Those involved with the commissioning of services for young people should draw on the insight and resources of community groups, charities and social enterprises wanting to provide environmental activities for young people.

Britain is fortunate to have many groups dedicated to environmental improvement, education and conservation from community to national and international scale.

The picture is one of exceptional quality and diversity. Up until now these organisations have not always been regarded as obvious partners with children and young people's services but, as the examples in this report show, there is considerable scope to change this. Partnership working will ensure the provision of high-quality environmental opportunities that have the primary focus of developing young people's social and personal skills.

Conclusions

The environment should be at the heart of our ambitions for young people. It underpins the development of personal responsibility and essential skills for the green economy, or what the Department for Energy and Climate Change calls the "the third industrial revolution".¹⁵⁹

More than this, it is a medium through which young people can develop good health and self-esteem whilst making a positive contribution to their communities and the planet generally.



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As one of the young people we encountered through this project told us,

"I learnt to weigh up my choices and options and I decided to take a positive path."¹⁶⁰

Annex 1

Background to the preparation of this report

This report builds on a literature review undertaken by Action for Children which examined research from UK and international sources. Action for Children is a children's charity that supports and speaks out for the UK's most vulnerable children and young people.¹⁶¹ To support their review, Action for Children prepared a series of case studies of good practice, showcasing the work of local authorities and voluntary and community organisation partners in

England. They also developed a guide for service providers who work with young people setting out eight practical and informative 'top tips', with examples, that they can use to promote a green thread in practice.¹⁶² These were promoted through a series of workshops organised by Action for Children and supported by consultant Charles Whitehead that provided feedback on our emerging findings.

Resilience, Engagement, Future Employment

Top tips for using sustainable development to improve outcomes for young people

All of the following tips contribute to developing young people's employability, resilience, and engagement. They were developed as part of the work by Action for Children to provide ideas and practical information for using sustainable approaches to enhance the delivery of outcomes for young people.

- 1 Promote active lifestyles as part of working with young people**
- 2 Explore local issues to engage young people in meaningful actions that have a global impact**
- 3 Engage young people in improving their local environment**
- 4 Use the natural environment as part of outdoor activity and learning programmes**
- 5 Include accreditation and awards linked to the environment as stepping stones to jobs and training**
- 6 Empower young people to be active citizens and lead the programmes you deliver**
- 7 Build partnerships that share learning and success**
- 8 Show your commitment to sustainable development**

For full details visit: www.actionforchildren.org.uk/sustainabledevelopment

In addition we held three consultation workshops with stakeholders. The first engaged officials responsible for young people policy within the Department for Education. The second engaged a range of organisations actively working with or for young people:

- UK Youth Parliament
- Brighton and Hove Youth Offending Team
- SEEd
- Eden Project
- Wiltshire County Council
- Otesha

- Envision
- National Council for Voluntary Youth Services
- Youth Hostel Association

The third workshop engaged young people participating in the Department for Education's Youth Leadership Programme, *The Youth of Today*,¹⁶³ including a representative from Young Pioneers.¹⁶⁴ We asked the young people what a 'good place to grow up' meant to them, and what solutions they thought would get us there. The feedback we received provided a useful backdrop to this report.

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www.sd-commission.org.uk

England

(Main office)

55 Whitehall

London SW1A 2HH

0300 068 6305

enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk

Scotland

Osborne House

1 Osborne Terrace

Edinburgh EH12 5HG

0131 625 1880

Scotland@sd-commission.org.uk

www.sd-commission.org.uk/scotland

Wales

Room 1, University of Wales

University Registry

King Edward VII Avenue

Cardiff CF10 3NS

029 2037 6956

Wales@sd-commission.org.uk

www.sd-commission.org.uk/wales

Northern Ireland

Room E5.11, Castle Buildings

Stormont Estate,

Belfast BT4 3SR

028 9052 0196

N.Ireland@sd-commission.org.uk

www.sd-commission.org.uk/northern_ireland