

Action for a better future

By Emma Cockburn, Outreach Officer, People & Planet

In December 2009 in Copenhagen over 180 countries will be trying to agree on an international climate change agreement to take over from the Kyoto Protocol with the aim of averting climate chaos. The outcome will affect the lives of today's students and their generation who will live with the consequences.

People & Planet as the UK's leading student campaigning organisation has been empowering young people to take action on the international issues they care about for the last 40 years. As a democratic charity run by students, the organisation educates and empowers students in post-16 education to take action on climate change and sustainability. With support from our peer leaders, it gives them the opportunity to become genuine active global citizens. Our aim is to engage learners with the issues to make a major difference to themselves in their school or college and beyond.

This year we are running workshops that help young people to put the UN conference in context



and to become directly involved by sending a photo message to the Copenhagen conference. And live blogs on our website from young people at the conference will mean students can engage with peers who are representing the UK's young people. Young people are then helped to turn their global learning into local action as People & Planet supports them in taking carbon-reducing actions as part of our national competition.

People & Planet's work doesn't just stop at the classroom door. By giving opportunities to young people to take positive action they can engage with decision makers at local, national and international level. During the UN climate talks we will be hosting events for under 18s in London, on 5 December to inform students about the conference and encourage them to express their opinions.

Also, on the 20–22 November People & Planet will be hosting Shared Planet, Europe's largest annual student conference on the environment, world poverty and human rights. Over 800 school, college and university students will get together to share solutions to today's problems. The weekend



will be packed with big-name speakers, skills and issue-based workshops for those new to the subjects as well as those who already know more. There will be debates, discussions and films as well as a massive party! A weekend guaranteed to inform and inspire students no matter what their background.

How does this fit with citizenship?

Setting up a People & Planet group at your organisation helps to meet the Government's sustainable schools' guidelines and post-16 citizenship learning objectives. Students will also be able to use participation in People & Planet activities as part of the requirements for a range of citizenship qualifications including GCSE and

A-level Citizenship Studies. Our work this year fits directly with the sustainable schools initiative. If this is something you want your students to get involved with, get in touch with us.

After our initial engagement with a year or tutorial group, we run workshops with interested students on how to get their voice heard in their college or school. From this students create their own student-led group, as an excellent volunteering opportunity where the political literacy of learners can increase dramatically. Students this year will create films about their own school or college, highlighting areas where the school/college's carbon footprint can be reduced. We can then support both staff and students through events, emails, campaign guides and workshops.

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Leicester College

The group at Leicester College put on awareness-raising events throughout the term such as green film day and a bike workshop. Two of its members sit on the college's sustainability group, making sure that the work the People & Planet group does influence managers and staff. The group has also piloted a new sustainability course at the college. All this hard work has meant that two students, Ashley Whitehead and Divyesh Tailor (pictured), were awarded the 'best contribution by a young person' at the 2009 Green Life Awards in Leicester.

"Winning this award is fantastic – it has inspired me to do more with People & Planet in the future. I can't wait!"

Ashley Whitehead





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Beyond the People & Planet group

There are other opportunities beyond joining a school and college group. Students can learn more skills and get further involved by volunteering with us. We train students to become bloggers, media representatives, communications volunteers, campaign advocates and group support volunteers. Matt McMullen (pictured below), a student from Chipping Norton College, became part of a People & Planet group in his last year at college. The group focused on becoming a Fairtrade College, one of the eight 'Sustainable Schools' doorways. They held a range of events as part of gaining Fairtrade status. Matt then went on to volunteer with People & Planet as a Group Support Volunteer, supporting a Stratford-Upon-Avon College group to become active global citizens. The college has managed to achieve Fairtrade status in less than nine months, a fantastic achievement.



"Through youth and student activism I have become empowered as both an individual and global citizen. I now know that I have the power to make a difference in helping tackle injustices. I have also gained some really amazing skills in public speaking, communication, time management and strategy planning."

Matt McMullen, Chipping Norton College

Events

Every year we hold a summer celebration day for students from across our network to celebrate the year, learn new skills, discuss global issues and plan how they are going to tackle them. We also hold larger events that focus on one issue; this year it was our youth for Fairtrade event. We can provide travel subsidies to a limited number of students who would otherwise not be able to come the event.

The future

This coming year we are piloting an on-line learning tool for students to take action through e-campaigning. Students will sign up for the five-week course which begins in January and will be sent emails with actions to take and tasks to complete each week. The final week of the course will coincide with a national People & Planet campaign week when the students will work as a group to take e-actions. Students will learn about the importance of e-campaigning and will find out for themselves how to raise their voice online. It is going to be a fantastic project!

For further information or to book a workshop contact: jamie.clarke@peopleandplanet.org or emma.cockburn@peopleandplanet.org or visit the website: www.peopleandplanet.org