

# OUR BRIGHT FUTURE EVALUATION

## Environmental Leadership: a research study



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**ERS Ltd and Collingwood Environmental Planning**

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Authors: Rebecca Jones, Owen White, Claire Twigger-Ross



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## PREFACE

### Our Bright Future

Our Bright Future is a £33m programme of 31 projects across the UK funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. Projects are being delivered by organisations across the environmental and youth sectors, united by the common aim of empowering young people (aged 11-24) to lead future environmental change. Ranging in scale, from local to national, projects focus on activities such as involving young people in practical environmental conservation, engaging them in vocational training, supporting them to develop their own campaigns around environmental issues and helping them to start their own sustainable enterprises. The seven year programme is managed by the Wildlife Trusts and is due to draw to a close at the end of 2022. In its first three and a half years of operation, Our Bright Future engaged over 35,000 young people (in the short- to long-term) in activities across the portfolio projects.



### Programme evaluation

ERS Ltd, in partnership with Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP), were commissioned in 2016 to undertake an evaluation of the Our Bright Future programme. The programme evaluation seeks to identify, analyse and assess: the collective impact of the 31 projects and good practice, as well as the added value of the programme's functions (i.e. cross-project learning).

The [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#) for the programme, published in 2019, indicated that participation in the Our Bright Future projects had a variety of positive impacts for young people. However, the report also concluded that there was a lack of evidence gathered directly from young people to verify and better understand the extent of these impacts and how they were facilitated by projects. In response to this gap in evidence, three themes were selected by the Our Bright Future Evaluation Panel<sup>1</sup> for further in-depth evaluation studies. This included designing a study to explore the extent to which young people participating in Our Bright Future projects feel that they are able and motivated to act as environmental leaders<sup>2</sup>.



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<sup>1</sup> Reporting to the Our Bright Future Steering Group, the Evaluation Panel comprises representatives of members of the consortium and the National Lottery Community Fund. It drives forward the research and evaluation of the programme.

<sup>2</sup> A youth environmental leader is defined as “an individual... who met four criteria: a positive attitude toward the environment, positive environmental behaviour, initiative or leadership activity, and involvement in multiple spheres of action.” (Arnold, Cohen & Warner, 2009)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was designed to gather data directly from participants themselves and **examine to what extent, and in what ways participants feel that they are able and motivated to act as environmental leaders**. It seeks to explore activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts related in particular to Our Bright Future Programme Outcome 1: *Participation in the Our Bright Future programme has had positive impacts on young people equipping them with the skills, experience and confidence to lead environmental change*.

The study is intended to **inform the ongoing delivery of Our Bright Future projects and projects across the youth and environment sectors**. It is therefore anticipated to be relevant to practitioners, policy makers and organisations seeking to engage young people in the environment (be that practically or theoretically).

This report presents the results of three key research activities undertaken between September 2019 and October 2020. **A literature review**, to better understand current frameworks and research into youth environmental leadership and identify key topics to explore in the primary evidence collection; **focus groups with young people** who are currently or have previously participated in an Our Bright Future project (17 young people participated across three focus groups); and **semi-structured interviews with young people** (11 interviews) and project staff (six interviews).

**Three Our Bright Future projects** were selected for the interviews and focus groups: My World My Home (Friends of the Earth); Bright Green Future (Centre for Sustainable Energy); and the Environmental Leadership Programme (Uprising). These projects were chosen given their focus on different aspects of leadership, because they represent a range of types of area (e.g. urban and rural) and to provide a good geographical spread. Young people and project staff from a number of other projects (Grassroots Challenge, My Place, One Planet Pioneers, and Tomorrow's Natural Leaders), were also interviewed to provide additional perspectives from projects which are not specifically focussed on leadership.

## Key Findings



**Overall, participating young people have a broad and inclusive view of what it means to be an environmental leader.** Key skills and competences that the young people feel are needed to lead environmental change included self-confidence, inclusive team working abilities, an ability to lead by example, a clear sense of self and direction, emotional competences such as resilience and accountability, and practical skills such as organisation and communication. This reflects closely the attributes of environmental leadership identified in the literature review.

*“An environmental leader is anyone who is passionate about the environment and wants to make a difference and is also willing to work with others to help them do the same. To influence others and have confidence to show other people what to do”. Project participant*

Based on a definition of youth environmental leadership proposed by Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009)<sup>3</sup>, almost all young people interviewed and who participated in the focus groups for this study could be considered environmental leaders. Nearly all focus group and interview participants have either already taken environmental leadership action or planned to do so in the future.

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<sup>3</sup> A youth environmental leader is defined as “an individual between the ages of 16 and 19 years who met four criteria: a positive attitude toward the environment, positive environmental behaviour, initiative or leadership activity, and involvement in multiple spheres of action”.



**Overall, the young people who participated in this study felt that the Our Bright Future programme has made them better equipped and motivated to lead environmental change.** Many of the participants felt that taking part in Our Bright Future was the *most* significant factor in influencing their feelings of confidence and empowerment to lead environmental change<sup>4</sup>.

*“The [Our Bright Future] project has been the most important influence on the way I think and act about the environment.” Project participant*

Some themes emerged when asking young people *how* being involved in their Our Bright Future project has made them feel more able to lead environmental change. These themes included: feeling empowered that their voice can be heard; gaining confidence from networking with other like-minded young people as well as meeting environmental professionals and decision makers; and also by gaining knowledge of environmental issues and practical skills/experience to help them lead change.

*“I can sometimes feel like I’m fighting a lost cause, but I felt empowered by being with like-minded people on the Uprising ELP.” Project participant*



**Many of the young people involved in this study planned to lead or take environmental action in the future.** Ways that participants planned to do this included: career and educational aspirations; campaigning; continuing involvement with their Our Bright Future project or fellow project participants; becoming involved in other projects similar to Our Bright Future; or taking personal actions for positive environmental change e.g. eating less meat.

*“It has helped me motivate other people to join, engage them and make them interested in the topic.” Project participant*



**All three case study projects reflect similar frameworks for youth empowerment and environmental leadership to those found in the literature.** For example, all three projects involve young people working in groups to develop their own local campaign or social action project chosen by them (for example a campaign related to air pollution on roads outside the participants’ school), while providing the young people with support (such as mentoring) and networking opportunities.

*“I’ve participated in many things I otherwise wouldn’t have been able to and have developed my campaigning skills.” Project participant*

The types of activity most mentioned by young people as being particularly effective in empowering them to become environmental leaders were:

- mentoring support;
- networking opportunities with other young people and environmental organisations;
- opportunities to speak in public;
- gaining ‘real-life’ experiences and skills by working together to design and deliver campaigns or projects; and,
- having access to training and skills development.

*“Support from mentors (they are amazing), not just limited to environmental issues, has made me feel confident in my own abilities.” Project participant*

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the Our Bright Future programme outcomes.



**Other factors, besides involvement in Our Bright Future, have influenced young peoples' views or confidence in leading environmental change.** These influences are mostly down to individuals' personal experiences, but some themes did emerge, including: educational background (e.g. chosen A level subjects, university degree); the school strikes for climate and growing publicity/media coverage of the climate crisis; social media; friends and family; and environmental issues in their local area e.g. air pollution.

### Overall conclusions

**Although the sample size is small, this study provides clear evidence that Our Bright Future has had an overall positive influence on these young people and their feelings of empowerment and motivation to lead positive environmental change.**

Many of the participants felt that taking part in Our Bright Future was the most significant factor in influencing these feelings, however other factors did also play a role, and these were mostly down to individuals' personal experiences. In conclusion, based on this small sample of young people, it is apparent that **Our Bright Future has achieved programme Outcome 1: Participation in the Our Bright Future programme has had positive impacts on young people equipping them with the skills, experience and confidence to lead environmental change.**

*"I have realised that even though we don't have much power as individuals, by working with others we can still influence change. I didn't know it was possible for 'normal' people to do that before."*  
Project participant

**Many of the ways in which participating young people felt more empowered to lead environmental change could be transferable to other types of leadership.** However, one thing that is potentially unique to environmental leadership is the importance of knowledge they gained about environmental issues that they would not have gained without participating in Our Bright Future.

*"It gave me knowledge and resources to feel more confident speaking out about environmental issues."* Project participant

Certain project activities were revealed by young people as being particularly effective in empowering them to become environmental leaders and these activities and forms of support also reflect theoretical framings found in the literature of effective youth empowerment and leadership development programmes. Projects aiming to help young people take a lead on environmental issues should focus on providing these opportunities for participants going forward.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Rationale and scope of the study

In July 2019 the [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#) of the Our Bright Future Programme was published. The report provided an overview and detailed findings from the evaluation at the mid-term point of programme implementation. While the Mid-Term Report included a wealth of information and findings on the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the Our Bright Future Programme, discussions within the Our Bright Future Evaluation Panel identified that there were some aspects of Programme delivery and evaluation of Programme outcomes which merited more in-depth assessment.

From a number of potential themes for more in-depth evaluation, three were selected by the Evaluation Panel as being important for further focussed evidence collection, analysis and evaluation:

- A study on the prospects and pathways of the Our Bright Future alumni;
- A study on the skills gained by Our Bright Future project participants; and,
- A study on how and to what extent Our Bright Future has empowered young people and equipped them to be active environmental citizens, and should they choose, environmental leaders.

This report presents the findings of the last of these three, exploring the extent to which young people participating in Our Bright Future projects feel that they are able and motivated to act as environmental leaders. This ‘youth environmental leadership’ study seeks to explore activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts related in particular to Our Bright Future Programme Outcome 1.

***Outcome 1: Participation in the Our Bright Future programme has had positive impacts on young people equipping them with the skills, experience and confidence to lead environmental change.***

While the Mid-Term Evaluation provided extensive evidence on the skills and self-confidence gained by participants of Our Bright Future, there was a lack of evidence specifically on the impact of the programme on young people’s *confidence to lead environmental change*. It was considered that this study would therefore help to better understand what is needed to support the development of the environmental leaders of the future.

The study was undertaken between September 2019 and October 2020.

### Methodology overview

Full details of the methodology can be found in [Appendix A](#). An overview is provided below. This study was informed by three key research activities:

- A literature review, to better understand current frameworks and research into youth environmental leadership and identify key topics to explore in the primary evidence collection (detailed finding of the literature review can be found in [Appendix B](#));
- Focus groups with young people who are currently or have previously participated in an Our Bright Future project; and,
- Semi-structured interviews with young people and project staff.

Three case study Our Bright Future projects were selected for the focus groups and interviews: My World My Home (Friends of the Earth); Bright Green Future (Centre for Sustainable Energy); and the Environmental Leadership Programme (Uprising). These projects were selected given their focus on different aspects of leadership (see Box 1), that they represent a range of areas (e.g. urban and rural) and to provide a good geographical spread. Young people and project staff from a number of other projects (Grassroots Challenge, My Place, One Planet Pioneers, and Tomorrow's Natural Leaders), were also interviewed to provide additional perspectives from projects which are not specifically focussed on leadership.

*Box 1 Leadership development approaches of the case study projects.*

 <p><b>Friends of the Earth</b></p>	<p>The <b>My World My Home</b> project mainly focuses on encouraging environmental leadership by empowering young people to 'take up space'. They focus on building confidence by telling young people how powerful they can be and then giving them the practical skills (e.g. organising a campaign) to use that power. The 12-month project is made up of a three-day residential trip, two-days campaign training, fortnightly coaching and ongoing campaign support.</p>
 <p><b>centre for sustainable energy</b></p>	<p>The <b>Bright Green Future</b> project strongly focuses on helping young people get a sense of their own core values and how to act upon these through providing knowledge and skills to organise their own 'local project'. It is a 12-month environmental leadership programme where young people can take part in webinars, workshops, their own local project, a work placement, and a residential summer school.</p>
 <p><b>UpRising</b></p>	<p>The <b>Uprising Environmental Leadership Programme</b> focuses more strongly on personal and professional development and a theory of change-based model of specifically developing knowledge, skills, connections and confidence. It is a nine-month environmental leadership programme that includes knowledge and skills sessions, mentoring, the opportunity to develop and run an environmental campaign and offers the chance to meet business, government and charity leaders.</p>

## Research questions

In seeking to understand the extent to which participating in Our Bright Future projects has empowered young people to become active environmental citizens, and should they choose, environmental leaders, the youth environmental leadership thematic study was structured around two key research questions (RQs) and sub-research questions:

### **RQ1) To what extent has involvement in Our Bright Future projects given young people confidence and skills to lead environmental change?**

- RQ1.1 What skills and competences do young people feel they need to lead environmental change?
- RQ1.2 Do young people who are participating or have participated in Our Bright Future feel equipped and motivated to lead environmental change?
- RQ1.3 How has Our Bright Future enabled young people to gain confidence and skills needed to lead environmental change?
- RQ1.4 In what ways and to what extent do young people who have participated in Our Bright Future plan to lead environmental change in future?

### **RQ2) What types of intervention and engagement have been most effective in fostering environmental leadership?**

- RQ2.1 What types of activity or engagement have been most effective in providing the skills and competences young people feel they need to lead environmental change?
- RQ2.2 What other factors have influenced young people's views or confidence in leading environmental change (e.g. participation in school climate strikes)?

## Limitations of this study

It is important to note certain limitations of this study.

Firstly, this thematic study focuses largely on three case study Our Bright Future projects: My World My Home, Bright Green Future, and Uprising Environmental Leadership Programme. These three studies all have leadership development as a central point of their project objectives and their frameworks for delivery strongly reflect frameworks for leadership development found in the literature. Therefore, there may be some limitations to what extent the findings from this research are representative or applicable to all other Our Bright Future projects.

Secondly, the size of the sample of young people and project staff from whom evidence was collected is relatively small (34 people in total, of which 28 young people and six project staff). While there is strong corroboration of findings across the focus groups and interviews (including non-case study interviewees) such a small sample has clear limitations for the strength of conclusion that can be drawn in relation to the outcomes and impacts of the whole Our Bright Future Programme.

## 2. RESEARCH FINDINGS



Many participants felt taking part in Our Bright Future was the most significant factor in influencing feelings of confidence and empowerment to lead environmental change.



Based on literature findings, nearly all participating young people could be considered environmental leaders.



The activities effective in empowering young people to become environmental leaders were: mentoring support; networking opportunities; opportunities to speak in public; gaining 'real-life' experiences and skills; and, having access to training and skills development.



Nearly all participants have either already taken environmental leadership action or planned to do so in the future.

This chapter presents the findings of the focus groups with young people and interviews with young people and project managers. It also seeks to compare the evidence collected from young people and projects with findings from the literature review set out in [Appendix B](#). Details of how the primary evidence collection and analysis was carried out are presented in [Appendix A](#).

Overall, the evidence collected from the different streams of research has been sufficient in responding the research questions. The format of the following discussion is set out in answer to each of the research questions and is a collation based on analysis of evidence collected from both the focus groups and interviews.

## RQ1. To what extent has involvement in Our Bright Future projects given young people confidence and skills to lead environmental change?

### Summary:

- Overall participating young people seem to have a broad and inclusive view of what it means to be an environmental leader.
- Key skills and competences that the young people feel are needed to lead environmental change included self-confidence, inclusive team working abilities, an ability to lead by example, a clear sense of self and direction, emotional competences such as resilience and accountability, and practical skills such as organisation and communication.
- Based on the definition by Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009), almost all young people consulted for this study could be considered environmental leaders.
- Based on the definition<sup>5</sup> by Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009)<sup>5</sup>, almost all young people interviewed and who participated in the focus groups for this study could be considered environmental leaders.
- Nearly all focus group and interview participants have either already taken environmental leadership action or plan to do so in the future.
- Overall, young people who participated in this study felt their participation in an Our Bright Future project made them better equipped and motivated to lead environmental change.
- Many participants felt that taking part in Our Bright Future was the *most* significant factor in influencing their feelings of confidence and empowerment to lead environmental change.
- Some themes emerged when asking young people how being involved in their Our Bright Future project has made them feel more able to stand-up for the environment. These themes include: feeling empowered that their voice can be heard, gaining confidence from networking with other like-minded young people as well as meeting environmental professionals and decision makers, and also by gaining knowledge of environmental issues and practical skills/experience to help them lead change.
- Many of the young people involved in this study planned to lead or take environmental action in the future. Ways that participants planned to do this included: career and educational aspirations; campaigning; continuing involvement with their Our Bright Future project or fellow project participants; becoming involved in other projects similar to our Bright Future; or taking personal actions for positive environmental change e.g. eating less meat.

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<sup>5</sup> “an individual between the ages of 16 and 19 years who met four criteria: a positive attitude toward the environment, positive environmental behaviour, initiative or leadership activity, and involvement in multiple spheres of action”.

### **RQ1.1. What skills and competences do young people feel they need to lead environmental change?**

There are various theories within the academic literature investigating styles of leadership and the roles and qualities of leaders (see [Appendix B](#)), with many of these ideas being reflected in young peoples' views of environmental leadership.

All focus group participants (n=17) had a strong idea of what environmental leadership means to them. A key theme to emerge from the focus group discussions, and also somewhat from the interviews, was the importance of team working spirit and a willingness and ability to work with different cultures and backgrounds and be inclusive of other peoples' points of view. A few participants highlighted, in particular, the importance of representing different demographics and understanding different perspectives when leading on environmental issues. Some interview participants also felt that incorporating other points of view and "*pushing forward on behalf of other people*" was an important part of being an environmental leader. Being able to compromise but also having a strong vision and the confidence to stand up for what you believe in was also considered by focus group participants to be an important competence to lead on environmental issues.

The idea of collective leadership, where a group of people work together toward a shared goal incorporating both cultural and social perspectives, was also discussed in the literature review. The fact that young people value a participatory approach to leadership, and the team working skills to facilitate this, supports the notion that there is a shift away from hierarchical styles of leadership<sup>6</sup>. The literature review suggests that, compared to other types of leadership, collective leadership may be best suited to dealing with complex environmental problems<sup>7</sup>. From the interviews with Our Bright Future project staff, it was clear that promoting diversity as strength and encouraging young people from different social, educational, and cultural backgrounds to work together was an important element of all the three case study projects.

The idea of environmental stewardship as a form of environmental leadership was also put forward by participants in the focus groups and interviews. This form of leadership is where environmental leaders take responsibility for their own actions and lead by example while also having the confidence to influence others to do the same. As explained in the literature review, this distinction between environmental behaviours and environmental action is what is needed to create change at the societal level<sup>8</sup>. For example, one focus group participant said that an environmental leader is:

*"not necessarily a traditional leader but [someone who] leads by example. Educate and explain why people should go on their own journey. We need everyone to change but we can't all be leaders so it's about helping people do what they can."* [focus group participant]

Having a clear sense of direction in what you want to achieve and mobilising others to join in and take part was also a strong theme in many of the interview discussions. One young person interviewee said:

*"an environmental leader is anyone who is passionate about the environment and wants to make a difference and is also willing to work with others to help them do the same. To influence others and have confidence to show other people what to do".* [young person interviewee]

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<sup>6</sup> Kahn et al (2009); Akiyama et al (2013)

<sup>7</sup> Akiyama et al. (2013)

<sup>8</sup> Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009)

Northouse's definition of leadership emphasises the influence process, arguing that the interaction between the leader and followers to achieve an agreed outcome is more important than the trait or ability of the leader<sup>9</sup>. Participants spoke more about *how* this mobilisation could be achieved in different ways, rather than what traits a leader needs to be able to influence others; this included awareness raising and education on environmental issues and what individuals can do to help. One of the young people interviewed said that an environmental leader "*should aim to inspire people rather than impress people*".

*"Someone who can lead a group and make people understand what changes the needed actions will bring about." [young person interviewee]*

*"Someone who knows clearly what they want to achieve and have clear goals. Also, able to communicate this clearly to everyone and why it's beneficial to them – it's easy for people to think that it is not something they need to worry about." [young person interviewee]*

Confidence was an attribute that all participants felt was important to be able to lead and stand up for the environment. Participants also put importance on other personal attributes such as self-awareness, perseverance and resilience, accountability, and personal conviction. The importance of social and emotional competences such as these were also emphasised in the literature<sup>10</sup>. The young people also felt that practical skills such as organisation, communication, and having a critical knowledge of environmental problems are important.

*"A leader needs to have a balance between conviction and adaptability – being confident in yourself so that you think you're right but not overly confident so that you can't realise and accept when you're wrong" [young person interviewee]*

From interviews with project managers, it was clear that all three case study projects encourage a broad view of environmental leadership and this certainly seems to have influenced the young peoples' perceptions. For example, the Uprising project leaders defined an environmental leader as someone who is empowered to have an opinion and a voice for what happens to the environment and is equipped with the skills to do something about it. The project explores different individual leadership styles and aims to help young people understand which style suits them best or which they would like to develop. The Bright Green Future (BGF) project managers also explained that BGF takes a broad view on what environmental leadership means. According to the project managers, the BGF project explains environmental leadership as being service orientated, whereby a group of people can lead by being at service to something bigger than themselves or by being part of a movement. The My World My Home (MWMH) project encourages an environmental justice framework approach to environmental leadership. One of the MWMH project managers defined a young environmental leader as a young person who is able to create the change they want for environmental justice. The MWMH project also defines a leader as someone who has followers; this could be a quiet leader that gets on and does what they say or a loud leader that gets everyone going in the group, or everything in between.

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<sup>9</sup> Armstrong & Gough (2019)

<sup>10</sup> Kahn et al (2009)

**RQ1.2. Do young people who are participating or have participated in Our Bright Future feel equipped and motivated to lead environmental change?**

Overall, the young people who participated in this study felt that the Our Bright Future programme has made them better equipped and motivated to lead environmental change. For example, participants from the first and second focus groups in particular felt that participating in their Our Bright Future projects was a very important factor in influencing feelings of confidence and empowerment to lead environmental change. All participants in the first focus group said that participating in their Our Bright Future project was the most important factor. The extent to which participating in an Our Bright Future project contributed to feelings of confidence and empowerment to lead change was not specifically discussed in the final focus group, but all participants said that they felt that they had gained confidence in standing up for the environment and leading change through being a part of an Our Bright Future project. One focus group participant said that:

*“the project has been the most important influence on the way I think and act about the environment”. [focus group participant]*

Five out of the 11 young people interviewed expressed that the activities they engaged in through Our Bright Future are the main reason they feel more confident to lead change. One participant said that participating in Our Bright Future was *“100% the most important thing”* and that they wouldn’t be so ‘activism centred’ without it. Another participant said that participating in Our Bright Future made them realise that they wanted to pursue a career in the environmental sector/(s). Some interviewees felt that participating in Our Bright Future was an important factor in their confidence to lead environmental change, but that other factors have also had an influence (see RQ2.2. *What other factors have influenced young people’s views or confidence in leading environmental change?*).

*“Yes, Bright Green Future has equipped me with the skills, knowledge, and resources I need to help tackle environmental issues head on. I’ve had opportunities to network, and this has really boosted my confidence”*  
[focus group participant]

*“Yes, because I feel more confident and have made connections with other environmentalists. I’ve participated in many things I otherwise wouldn’t have been able to and have developed my campaigning skills. I’m also more aware of environmental issues.”* [focus group participant]



Out of the 11 young people who took part in an interview, seven said they already considered themselves to be an environmental leader. Four did not yet feel they were an environmental leader or were unsure, but said they felt they could help (or were already helping) the environment in some way. One interviewee said they used to think of themselves as an environmental leader when they were more actively involved at school (i.e. with an eco-collective) but did not consider themselves a leader anymore. Another interviewee said that although they did not feel they were an environmental leader yet, they felt that they had the potential to be one in the future. Despite perhaps not defining themselves as environmental leaders, 10 out of the 11 young people who took part in an interview felt that participating in an Our Bright Future project had positively influenced how they felt about being an environmental leader.

*"It has helped me motivate other people to join, engage them and make them interested in the topic" [focus group participant]*

Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009) define a young environmental leader as "an individual between the ages of 16 and 19 years who met four criteria: a positive attitude toward the environment, positive environmental behaviour, initiative or leadership activity, and involvement in multiple spheres of action (Tanner, 1998)"<sup>11</sup>. Based on this definition almost all young people interviewed and who participated in the focus groups for this study could be considered environmental leaders. Nearly all focus group and interview participants had either already taken environmental leadership action or planned to do so in the future. Examples of ways that participants feel they are already taking actions as environmental leaders, either as part of their Our Bright Future project or independently since being involved in Our Bright Future, include:



changing their own behaviours and encouraging friends to behave more environmentally, e.g. recycling more, taking up a plant-based diet.



leading or participating in environmental campaigns; for example, one interviewee spoke about a campaign for peat-free soil in garden centres, another interviewee spoke about a campaign to improve cycling around their college.



organising events e.g. a pop-up thrift shop at their college, a healthy eating event in a local park, litter picks, and attending events such as nature festivals.



taking conservation action and showing others how they can do the same, e.g. planting trees, beach clean-ups, restoring community gardens.



starting a blog or social media page to inform and motivate people on how to take environmental action.



engaging in discussions and meetings with Our Bright Future and The Wildlife Trusts.



attending the school climate strikes and other protests including the Black Lives Matter protests.



joining the Friends of the Earth steering group or the Our Bright Future Youth Forum.



becoming a student governor/green ambassador at their school/college.



engaging in public speaking about environmental issues, either at events or at their school/college.

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009)

The evidence suggests clearly that the type of Our Bright Future project each young person had been involved in had an influence on how they could see themselves helping the environment. For example, when asked specifically about campaigning, those who had campaigning experience from their Our Bright Future project, including those from the three case study projects, generally felt more confident that they could lead on something like this. However, many of the participants who didn't feel particularly confident to lead an environmental campaign appreciated that there are many roles involved in organising a campaign and expressed willingness to help in something like this in other ways, e.g. generating funding, spreading the word on social media, and/or participating in planning meetings.

### ***RQ1.3. How has Our Bright Future enabled young people to gain confidence and skills needed to lead environmental change?***

All of the young people interviewed felt that participating in Our Bright Future had improved their confidence to engage in discussions about the environment with friends and other young people, adults they know, and people they don't know. Generally, participants felt more confident in speaking to people they know and others their age than adults they don't know, but many participants said that taking part in Our Bright Future had given them more experience of talking to people they don't know and that this had helped their confidence.

Some themes emerged when asking young people how being involved in their Our Bright Future project has made them feel more able to stand-up for the environment. One key theme was the confidence gained from the networks and connections made through Our Bright Future; be it either with other like-minded young people or through connecting with industry professionals and decision makers. Several young people in the focus groups felt empowered by meeting and working with other young people who share their same views on the environment. A number of interviewees also said that spending time with other like-minded young people helped boost their confidence. One interviewee explained that they were not very confident at the start of the project but finding out that others were in the same situation helped them realise that they weren't as unconfident as they thought, and they were actually able to help others.

A focus group participant from the Uprising Environmental Leadership Programme felt that the exposure to industry professionals in a safe space was also particularly valuable. A few interview participants specifically said that speaking with MPs and other people of power through their Our Bright Future projects greatly increased their confidence and made them feel like they had a voice for change. The interviews with project staff supported this finding, as they also felt that giving young people the opportunity to expand their networks was important to leadership development. A staff member from the Bright Green Future project said that the ability to work with those from different backgrounds and seeing diversity as strength in environmental leadership was a big part of the project.

*"I have realised that even though we don't have much power as individuals, by working with others we can still influence change. I didn't know it was possible for 'normal' people to do that before." [focus group participant]*

*"I can sometimes feel like I'm fighting a lost cause, but I felt empowered by being with like-minded people on the Uprising ELP. Other participants value your contribution." [focus group participant]*

*"I learned how to form new relationships based on our shared interests, especially when we were discussing our campaign." [focus group participant]*

Feeling empowered that their voice can be heard was a key thing that some interview participants mentioned as an outcome of their Our Bright Future experience. For example, one interviewee said

they learnt that *“even doing a small thing within a group can make a big difference, there is potential to achieve change”*. Another interviewee said that running their campaign for better bike routes and greener travel around their college made them realise that they have a voice and that *“one voice does matter”*. Another interviewee said that their Our Bright Future project has been *“insanely empowering”* and that meeting people in the activism community and feeling accepted has taught them that activism is something they can do.

*“Self-confidence to just do things and to present to/talk to people (including MPs).” [focus group participant]*

*“Participating in My World My Home has enabled me to have more confidence when speaking publicly, especially during our council meetings” [focus group participant]*

Another way that young people in the focus groups felt that taking part in their Our Bright Future project had helped them feel better equipped to stand up for the environment or lead on environmental issues was through the knowledge they gained on environmental issues. Some focus group participants said that they had been made more aware of environmental issues and the environmental movement. One participant said that they felt they now have the facts to support them and that *“knowledge is power”*. As well as knowledge, many focus group participants felt they had gained practical skills to help them lead change. For example, how to effectively communicate their views, learning about practical ways to help the environment, research skills, and public speaking were some of the skills participants reported gaining from taking part in Our Bright Future.

*“Awareness of my own values and scale in which I can apply this to everyday life. An understanding of how change/contribution can vary from an individual perspective.” [focus group participant]*

*“Finding a tangible way to actually ‘stand up’ with an impact” [focus group participant]*

*“It gave me knowledge and resources to feel more confident speaking out about environmental issues.” [focus group participant]*

#### **RQ1.4. In what ways and to what extent do young people who have participated in Our Bright Future plan to lead environmental change in future?**

Out of the 17 young people who participated in the focus groups, six participants expressed career aspirations relating to the environment and sustainability or said they planned to go on to study environment-related subjects at university. This included aspirations to work in environmental policy, or for an environmental NGO, the charity sector or local council. One participant from one of the case study projects said that they had recently applied for a job at a local council in the walking and cycling team and that they would not have done so if they had not been involved in the project. Another participant spoke about how they had continued working with their social action campaign group after graduating from their project in 2019 and have been organising online events on social action and the environment. They are also looking at establishing the campaign they started through the project as a social enterprise and are currently exploring different funding options.

*“I have connected with industry professionals in sustainability and this has given me a better idea of how I can enter into a career in this sector” [focus group participant]*

In interviews, several young people also said they had career or further education aspirations relating to the environment and sustainability. For example, a few interview participants expressed an interest in going into politics and environmental policy, either at the local, national or European level. One participant said that they know they *“want to be able to change policy at the top”* and that this had stemmed from time they spent at the European Commission European Sustainable Energy Week when

doing work experience when they were 16 but that participating in Our Bright Future has consolidated this ambition. Another interviewee spoke about immediate plans to continue to speak to MPs and local councils to put forward the views of fellow young people on the environment, as well as longer-term aspirations to one day become an MP with the goal to make the environment and peoples' rights a greater priority. Other ways that the young people interviewed plan to lead environmental change in the future included through leading campaigns, careers in environmental communications and conservation, and through weaving it into a planned career as a teacher to get pupils more involved in the environment.

A number of the focus group and interview participants also expressed an interest in staying connected to their Our Bright Future projects once graduated / since they have graduated. For example, one My World My Home participant said they would like to get more involved with the Friends of the Earth youth steering group, and one Bright Green Future alumni said they plan to stay involved with the project as the social media coordinator for Bright Green Future alumni and also becoming an Our Bright Future ambassador. One interview participant explained that they are currently involved in launching a new award scheme, similar to the Duke of Edinburgh award, called the Action for Wildlife award. It is a youth-led peer-assessed award scheme that focuses on volunteering activities that aims to make a difference for the environment and evaluates progress in e.g. confidence, knowledge about nature, employability etc. Volunteering activities that contribute to the award could include building bird boxes, litter picking, attending a protest; they aim to include a wide scope of things to make it accessible to all from age 11 years and up.

Other participants planned to stay engaged and involved in environmental change on a personal level, for example by eating less meat and going on litter picks. A focus group participant said they were hoping to become an environmental officer at their college, where they will have leadership responsibilities in organising events like a 'green week'. Other participants said they hope to be involved in other projects similar to Our Bright Future if they get the opportunity. A few participants said that their experiences of Our Bright Future have made them want to get involved with other social causes including the Black Lives Matter movement.

### Future plans and aspirations of Our Bright Future participants



Pursuing careers related to the environment and sustainability.



Commencing environment-related study at university.



Campaigning on environmental and social issues.



Involvement in politics and environmental policy.



Maintaining future connection with Our Bright Future projects.

## RQ2. What types of intervention and engagement have been most effective in fostering environmental leadership?

### Summary:

- All three case study projects reflect similar frameworks for youth empowerment and environmental leadership to those found in the literature. For example, all three projects involve young people working in groups to develop their own local campaign or social action project chosen by them, while providing the young people with support and networking opportunities to succeed.
- The types of activity most mentioned by young people as being effective in empowering them to become environmental leaders were: mentoring support; networking opportunities with other young people and environmental organisations; opportunities to speak in public; gaining ‘real-life’ experiences and skills by working together to design and deliver campaigns or projects; and, having access to training and skills development.
- Other factors, besides involvement in Our Bright Future, have influenced young peoples’ views or confidence in leading environmental change. These influences are mostly down to individuals’ personal experiences, but some themes did emerge e.g. educational background, the school strikes for climate and growing publicity/media coverage of the climate crisis, social media, friends and family, and environmental issues facing their local area e.g. air pollution.

### **RQ2.1. What types of activity or engagement have been most effective in providing the skills and competences young people feel they need to lead environmental change?**

The discussions with project staff from each of the three case study projects highlighted some key similarities and differences in the way that each project aims to support young people to become environmental leaders (or develop confidence to be). All three projects specifically aim to build young peoples’ confidence and leadership skills but there are slight differences between their approaches and which elements they place the strongest focus on (See Box 1).

There are different frameworks for youth empowerment and leadership development that are described in the literature review<sup>12</sup>. A key theme across these is that it is not just personal attributes that are important for youth leadership but also the opportunities that are available to young people. For example, motivation alone is not enough, young people also need opportunities to form valuable connections and the experience to be able to influence meaningful change. Kahn et al (2009) propose that a leadership development programme should provide “*opportunities that engage young people in challenging action, around issues that reflect their genuine needs and offer authentic opportunities to make decisions and effect change, in an environment of support in which young people can reflect on their experiences*”<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, Riemer et al. (2013) propose that effective leadership programme activities should “*be participatory, teach participants to impact change in the community context, and be based on best practices*”<sup>14</sup>. All three case study projects reflect a similar framework

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<sup>12</sup> Armstrong & Gough (2019); Treseder (1997); Jennings (2006); Zimmerman (1995); Kahn et al. (2009); Zimmerman et al (2011)

<sup>13</sup> Kahn et al. (2009)

<sup>14</sup> Bourassa (2017)

for youth empowerment/environmental leadership to those found in the literature. For example, all three projects involve young people working in groups to develop their own local campaign or social action project chosen by them, while providing the young people with support and networking opportunities.

There were a number of key themes that emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions about what specific types of support or activities have helped participating young people feel more able to engage in environmental action and take a lead on environmental issues. The types of activity most mentioned by young people as being particularly effective in empowering them to become environmental leaders were:



Each of these is explored in more detail below.

### Mentoring and support

Each of the three case study projects had some kind of mentoring scheme, whether it be with a project staff member (My World My Home and Bright Green Future) or with an environmental professional (Uprising), and this was something many of the participants said helped build their confidence during the project. One participant from the Bright Green Future project said that, although they could have probably done it without, having access to an adult with experience when they were planning and running their campaign was really useful.

A number of interview participants also spoke about the support and encouragement they received from mentors or project managers and how this helped them gain confidence in their abilities. One interviewee said that the trust that their project manager had in their abilities made them feel confident to progress things independently and without having to always check things with them. One focus group participant from the Uprising Environmental Leadership Programme did say that they felt that they could have had more support from their project and felt that, from the focus group discussion, those on other projects had more. Providing an environment of support is a key element seen across several frameworks for youth empowerment and leadership development<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Kahn et al (2009); Hart (1992); Treseder (1997)

*“Support from mentors (they are amazing), not just limited to environmental issues, has made me feel confident in my own abilities” [focus group participant]*

*“Access to a mentor throughout the project who listened to project ideas and helped guide our projects” [focus group participant]*

### Networking opportunities

Participants from all three case study projects said that activities where they had an opportunity to network really helped them gain confidence and leadership skills. For example, participants found panel discussions with different experts from industry, e.g. policy professionals or people from environmental NGOs useful. Participants also valued opportunities where they got to talk and negotiate with people in positions of power (e.g. politicians, local councillors, decision makers) as this allowed them to see the decision-making process in action. One participant said that this made them realise that these people *“do not always have the answers or the knowledge. They don’t always know what to do, so this makes you feel you have more power to confront others’ views”*. Another participant said that this gave them the opportunity to collaborate with other established campaigning groups. One of the older focus group participants and Uprising alumni, pointed out that they and other Environmental Leadership Programme alumni in the focus group had benefited from the networks made during the programme in finding jobs in the environmental sector. These findings are in line with Treseder’s framework for youth participation, which maintains that providing young people access to those in power is an important condition for youth empowerment and leadership development<sup>16</sup>.

Networking with other young people who have similar interests and care about the environment also made participants feel more confident to lead change. For example, participants spoke about taking part in events such as the Greenbelt festival, Basecamp festival and the Friends of the Earth youth gathering. The opportunity to network with other like-minded young people who also care about the environment was also important to interviewees from a range of different Our Bright Future projects. One interviewee said that their Our Bright Future project brought together young people from all different backgrounds and that they have been able to network with other young people who are more actively helping the environment. Several focus group and interview participants said that their Our Bright Future project was the first opportunity they had to engage with other environmentally conscious young people. According to Tindall<sup>17</sup>, having social network ties and receiving encouragement to participate is a very strong predictor of who will get involved in environmental activism. Similarly, having relations with other influential and passionate people is identified as an important factor in supporting leadership<sup>18</sup>.

*“Networking has been really instrumental – making connections with people you can learn from.” [focus group participant]*

*“Residential trip doing workshops with other people from around the UK who care about the environment” [focus group participant]*

*“We had a weekend session with different cohorts focusing on our [social action campaigns], having guest speakers, meeting new people with the same motivations” [focus group participant]*

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<sup>16</sup> Treseder (1997)

<sup>17</sup> Tindall (2019)

<sup>18</sup> Arnold, Cohen and Warner (2009)

## Public speaking

A few participants said that through their projects they had the opportunity to speak at events and the support and encouragement they got to do this helped them feel more confident to do more public speaking which then led to further opportunities. One participant said that having their views heard through speaking at events or conferences made them feel empowered. It was clear from many of the interview discussions that the opportunity to contribute their own views and ideas at regular meetings as well as practice certain skills in a safe environment was valuable to many Our Bright Future participants. A safe environment was not defined but is assumed to include being given time to prepare properly, be encouraged and reassured that their voice and opinion is valid, given constructive and fair feedback when required, and supported in accessing or understanding any matters discussed.

*“Being shown environmental organisations really value youth voices made me feel like I should actively be using that voice”. [young person interviewee]*

*“The environment that they have created gives you confidence to get involved in discussions.” [young person interviewee]*

*“Attending parliamentary events and facilitating a workshop through Our Bright Future.” [focus group participant]*

*“Opportunities to do public speaking – the more you do it the more you gain confidence – at Uprising leadership programme I was given lots of opportunities” [focus group participant]*

*“As a young person you always think people know more than you but learning that you can contribute and learn from others has been the most important thing.” [young person interviewee]*

## Hands-on learning and skills development

Existing research suggests that effective youth leadership programmes involve approaches that engage young people in challenging action, around issues that reflect their own interests and needs and offer authentic opportunities to effect change<sup>19</sup>. Zimmerman et al also argue that engaging young people in activities that they choose and have control over, helps them gain confidence and leadership skills<sup>20</sup>. Many participants spoke about the valuable ‘real life’ experience and skills they gained from organising a campaign or local project that mattered to them. In particular the skills learnt in the build-up of their self-led campaigns or local projects, one My World My Home participant said that *“being in situations where you need to respond to problems/barriers made me feel more confident”* and one Bright Green Future project participant said that organising their local project gave them a sense of self-worth and that it *“shows how powerful you can be”*. They even felt empowered to take their project forward after the Bright Green Future project and were considering the possibility of setting it up as an NGO.

*“Learning how to build a campaign – and understand how to influence change.” [focus group participant]*

*“The campaign: useful if you want to go into the charity sector. [Learnt] different skills that will be used in the future e.g. IT.” [focus group participant]*

*“Gained confidence by having to speak to strangers (to collect signatures for a petition about air pollution)”*

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<sup>19</sup> Kahn et al (2009)

<sup>20</sup> Zimmerman et al (2011)

## Training and skills development

As previously mentioned, many participants felt they had gained valuable knowledge about environmental issues and that this helped them feel empowered to engage in environmental action and lead on environmental issues. From the focus group and interview discussions, it was also clear to see that participants found specific workshops and skills training sessions available through their projects to be very effective at helping them feel better equipped in this way. In particular, when asked which project activities helped them feel more able to take a lead on environmental issues, focus group participants mentioned learning/knowledge sessions, negotiation workshops, campaign skills training days, hands-on residential training days, and social media training. Participants from the Uprising Environmental Leadership Programme also spoke about a mock Dragon's Den event where they were able to pitch their campaign/project ideas to a panel of judges who constructively critique and make sure the project is viable; one participant said that *"the Dragon's Den event was a defining moment"*. Some participants said that the skills they have learned were useful for future career aspirations and they also got help with CV development. Bright Green Future participants also valued the work experience placement opportunity they got through the project.

*"Work experience gave me real insight into how I could work in my passions and make a positive difference."  
[focus group participant]*

*"Learning about issues that affect us, especially locally" [focus group participant]*

### **RQ2.2. What other factors have influenced young people's views or confidence in leading environmental change?**

There are a range of influences that have had an impact on the views and confidence of the young people we spoke to in the focus groups and interviews and this was mostly down to individuals' personal experiences, however some themes did emerge. For example, several participants in the focus group felt that their educational background or school experiences had an influence on them wanting to pursue environmental leadership. One participant said that they had been interested in environmental issues since they were at primary school where they did an eco-schools project. A couple of participants had also studied environment-related subjects at college or university and felt this had an influence.

*"I'm at the stage in school where I am trying to decide what to do – thought to myself why can't I go into career like that where I can actively change things for the better that I am passionate about." [young person interviewee]*

*"I know someone else at college who is really keen for the environment and helping people and we always talk about the environment when we see each other." [young person interviewee]*

Another emerging theme was the influence of the school strikes for climate and the visibility of Greta Thunberg as an inspirational young leader. The younger participants (e.g. those still at school/college) particularly, said that this had had a big impact on them and that they felt inspired to also do something and get involved. One participant from the Uprising project said that Greta Thunberg was *"very much an inspiration – it's particularly interesting how people in power respond to her and don't change anything"*. One older participant said that the school strikes were less relevant to them and that it was more about the personal opportunities that they had that made them feel passionate about leading environmental change.

Some of the Our Bright Future project staff also felt that the school strikes for climate movement and the upswell in mainstream media coverage of environmental issues was having an important influence

on young people participating and leading environmental campaigns. One of the Uprising project staff members said that anecdotally it seems young people are now more switched on in terms of environmental issues and are coming to the leadership programme with a huge amount of knowledge and interest already. They have seen an increase in interest for the Environmental Leadership Programme compared to their other leadership programme. A staff member from Bright Green Future also said that more and more project applicants talk about Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough in their applications suggesting this media coverage is influencing them.

*“It’s our world and the effects of extinction from climate change has pushed me to talk and educate other people about what we can do. Also always enjoyed being outside.” [young person interviewee]*

Focus group participants said that social media also had an influence on their feelings about getting involved in environmental action. One participant said that although the project was the catalyst, through it they have *“started following lots of environmental campaigners/activists on social media and have learnt through them and collected ideas”*. Another participant said they follow politicians on social media as *“it’s important to see what is going on right now to know how to make change effectively”*. Another said that social media was very important to them for building networks and that the people they follow *“certainly influence and make me feel able to lead, they inspire me. I only got involved [in my Our Bright Future project] from seeing an Instagram advert”*.

*“Platforms like Instagram can really help you stay engaged – to find the right groups and who to engage with – once you’re in the right groups you naturally find out what is going on.” [young person interviewee]*

More specific personal factors that were apparent from the focus group and interview discussion included influences from where people had grown up and specific environmental issues facing their local areas, experiences they had while they were at school (e.g. one participant had been part of the National Citizens Service and then the International Citizens Service), experiences in job roles or during apprenticeships, travel experiences (e.g. during a gap year) where they had witnessed environmental damage/degradation, and also the impact of documentaries like Blue Planet. In the interviews, a few young people said that family and friends had an influence on how they felt about the environment and wanting to do something to protect it. Some of the interviewees also spoke about leadership experience they had gained from elsewhere that wasn’t necessarily related to the environment; for example, teaching violin lessons or being hockey captain while at university.

*“My mum encourages me a lot... I’ve been brought up around environmentally engaged people – that gave me a background level of caring [about the environment]” [young person interviewee]*

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the young people involved in this research were either already taking environmental leadership actions or planned to do so in the future. Not all of the young people openly considered themselves as environmental leaders. However, based on definitions taken from the literature review, almost all young people interviewed and who participated in the focus groups for this study could be considered environmental leaders.

Despite other factors at play that have influenced many of the young peoples' feelings of empowerment and environmental leadership, it is clear from this study that Our Bright Future has had an overall positive influence on these young people and their feelings of empowerment and motivation to lead positive environmental change. Many of the participants felt that taking part in Our Bright Future was the *most* significant factor in influencing these feelings. In conclusion, based on this small sample of young people, it is apparent that Our Bright Future has achieved programme. Outcome 1: *Participation in the Our Bright Future programme has had positive impacts on young people equipping them with the skills, experience and confidence to lead environmental change.*

When asked specifically how taking part in their Our Bright Future projects had influenced these feelings of empowerment, there were some key things that the young people felt they had gained from their experiences. In particular, the young people valued: feeling empowered that their voice can be heard, gaining confidence from networking with other like-minded young people as well as meeting environmental professionals and decision makers, and also by gaining knowledge of environmental issues and practical skills/experience to help them lead change. Many of these are potentially transferable skills that are relevant for any type of leadership. However, one thing that stood out from the perspective of participating young people as being specific to environmental leadership, was the importance of knowledge they gained about environmental issues that they would not have gained without participating in Our Bright Future.

Certain project activities were perceived by young people as being particularly effective in empowering them to become environmental leaders and these activities/forms of support also reflected recommendations found in the literature for effective youth empowerment/leadership development programmes. Therefore, going forward, projects aiming to help young people take a lead on environmental change should focus on supporting young people by providing:

- Mentoring support,
- Networking opportunities with other young people and environmental organisations,
- Opportunities to speak in public,
- 'Real-life' experiences and skills by helping young people work together to design and deliver campaigns or projects,
- Access to training and skills development.

## APPENDIX A METHODOLOGY

In seeking to understand the extent to which participating in Our Bright Future projects has empowered young people to become active environmental citizens, and should they choose, environmental leaders, the youth environmental leadership thematic study was structured around two key research questions (RQs) and six sub-research questions:

**RQ1) To what extent has involvement in Our Bright Future projects given young people confidence and skills to lead environmental change?**

- RQ1.1 What skills and competences do young people feel they need to lead environmental change?
- RQ1.2 Do young people who are participating or have participated in Our Bright Future feel equipped and motivated to lead environmental change?
- RQ1.3 How has Our Bright Future enabled young people to gain confidence and skills needed to lead environmental change?
- RQ1.4 In what ways and to what extent do young people who have participated in Our Bright Future plan to lead environmental change in future?

**RQ2) What types of intervention and engagement have been most effective in fostering environmental leadership?**

- RQ2.1 What types of activity or engagement have been most effective in providing the skills and competences young people feel they need to lead environmental change?
- RQ2.2 What other factors have influenced young people's views or confidence in leading environmental change (e.g. participation in school climate strikes)?

To answer the research questions, three key research activities were undertaken:

- A literature review, to better understand current frameworks and research into youth environmental leadership and identify key topics to explore in the primary evidence collection;
- Focus groups with young people who are currently or have previously participated in an Our Bright Future project; and,
- Semi-structured interviews with young people and project staff.

Each of these is described in more detail below.

Three Our Bright Future projects were selected for the focus groups and interviews: My World My Home (Friends of the Earth); Bright Green Future (Centre for Sustainable Energy); and the Environmental Leadership Programme (Uprising). These projects were selected given their focus on different aspects of leadership, that they represent range of areas (e.g. urban and rural) and to provide a good geographical spread. Young people and project staff from a number of other projects (Grassroots Challenge, My Place, One Planet Pioneers, and Tomorrow's Natural Leaders), were also interviewed to provide additional perspectives from projects which are not specifically focussed on leadership.

## Literature review

As a first task in the thematic study a short literature review was completed. The findings were used to inform the approach and framing of primary research. The literature review is presented in Section 3 and sought to scope the thematic study, in particular defining key terms and setting out a brief understanding of current knowledge related to youth environmental leaders and factors that empower young people to participate as active environmental citizens.

The focus of the literature reviewed was on exploring current knowledge on ‘public’ environmental actions rather than private, i.e. environmental activism and participation rather than individual behaviours (like recycling or eating less meat). The focus of the review was primarily on young people as environmental leaders, but the review also sought to identify literature related to broader framings of environmental leadership, and young people playing a role as environmental citizens. This latter aspect recognises that not all young people will want to be ‘leaders’ or will see themselves as leaders.

## Focus groups with young people

Three focus groups were convened in May and June 2020 to bring together young people from the three case study projects. The original intention had been to hold these focus groups in person, however due to Covid-19 restrictions this was not possible and all focus groups were arranged online using Zoom.

The objectives of the focus groups were to:

- To enable discussion of what the concept of ‘environmental leadership’ means for young participants in Our Bright Future projects.
- To allow participants to share experiences with each other and discuss the ways in which being involved in Our Bright Future projects have given them confidence to be environmental leaders (or active environmental citizens).
- For participants to reflect together on what else has influenced them and made them feel able to environmental leaders, and to reflect on the extent to which Our Bright Future projects have had an influence.
- For participants to share with each other and discuss the ways they are already or are planning to stand up for the environment and/or lead environmental change.

Each focus group involved six young people from the three case study projects (My World My Home (Friends of the Earth), Bright Green Future (Centre for Sustainable Energy), Environmental Leadership Programme (Uprising), and was facilitated by two members of the evaluation team. Staff from each project proposed young people to participate with the aim of ensuring a balance in each focus group across the three projects and to provide a range of ages and backgrounds. The participating young people were all at least 16 years old, with no strict upper age limit, although the focus was on the current cohort and recent alumni.

The focus groups lasted approximately two hours and were structured around facilitated discussions and the use of the Mentimeter<sup>21</sup> interactive online tool to gather the participating young people’s views on environmental leadership, activities they have engaged in through their Our Bright Future project that have empowered them to lead environmental change and the extent to which Our Bright Future has supported their development as active environmental citizens or leaders.

Notes were taken during the focus groups for the purposes of analysis and each focus group was also recorded although full transcripts were not prepared.

### Semi-structured interviews

To supplement the focus group findings and to enable themes emerging in the focus groups to be explored in more detail 17 semi-structured interviews were arranged and completed between June and July 2020. These included 11 young people, including three from the three case study projects and eight from other projects (two from Grassroots challenge, two from My Place, two from One Planet Pioneers, and two from Tomorrow’s Natural Leaders). Project staff involved in mentoring young people or implementing Our Bright Future activities related to youth leadership were also interviewed. In total six project staff were interviewed from the case study projects.

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<sup>21</sup> Mentimeter is a free-to-use interactive online presentation platform for hosting Live Q&A sessions, polling and brainstorming. See: <https://www.mentimeter.com/>

An interview protocol was developed for the interviews with young people and project staff, and these were shared with interviewees in advance. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and notes were taken for analysis purposes.

### **Analysis**

The outcomes of the focus groups and interviews were analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Data from the focus groups and interviews were collated and coded in a Word document in a structure based around the evaluation questions to support the identification of themes and 'clusters' of findings. Excel was then used to compile interview and focus group notes for the purposes of comparison and identification of thematic findings from across the evidence streams.

### **Limitations of this study**

It is important to note certain limitations of this study.

Firstly, this thematic study focuses largely on three case study Our Bright Future projects: My World My Home, Bright Green Future, and Uprising Environmental Leadership Programme. These three studies all have leadership development as a central point of their project objectives and their frameworks for delivery strongly reflect frameworks for leadership development found in the literature. Therefore, there may be some limitations to what extent the findings from this research are representative or applicable to all other Our Bright Future projects.

Secondly, the size of the sample of young people and project staff from whom evidence was collected is relatively small (34 people in total, of which 28 young people and six project staff). While there is strong corroboration of findings across the focus groups and interviews (including non-case study interviewees) such a small sample has clear limitations for the strength of conclusion that can be drawn in relation to the outcomes and impacts of the whole Our Bright Future Programme

## APPENDIX B LITERATURE AND EVIDENCE REVIEW

### Introduction

This short literature review helped scope and provide context for this thematic study. The focus on leadership and empowering young people to become environmental leaders relates to one of the key outcomes of the Our Bright Future programme: *participation in the Our Bright Future programme has had positive impacts on young people, equipping them with the skills, experience and confidence to lead environmental change.*

The literature overall confirms that young people are important drivers of innovation and change in society and have distinct concerns and responsibilities in relation to the environment. In some cases, they are also disproportionately affected by environmental risks and hazards<sup>22</sup>. Young people bring their own perspectives and should be encouraged to engage in environmental action and to help generate effective responses to ecological challenges<sup>23</sup>. Additionally, young people are well placed to be leaders of change as they are undergoing identity development, remain open to new behaviours and ways of being, and are able to influence people in different groups and age ranges<sup>24</sup>.

This section provides an overview of the literature review findings related to

- Youth leadership as a concept: how it can be defined; the process of empowerment; and understanding environmental leadership.
- Existing frameworks of youth empowerment and leadership.
- Types of engagement and activities to empower young people as leaders, including challenges for this engagement.
- Skills and competencies that current research suggests young people need to become leaders.
- Evidence related to recent examples of youth environmental activism.

The review then draws some conclusions that were used to guide and inform the evidence collection and analysis which informed this thematic study.

### Conceptualising youth leadership

Leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon, situated in place, context and time. What defines effective leadership has been a topic of discussion for centuries and this discourse has evolved over time<sup>25</sup>. We depend on leaders to respond to situations in time and place<sup>26</sup>. Kahn et al (2009) argue that the nature and meaning of leadership is changing in response to changing societies, and the rise of complex challenges. They argue that there is a growing shift away from hierarchical styles of leadership, towards more inclusive and participatory styles of leadership. Akiyama et al (2013) also

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<sup>22</sup> Ernst et al. (2017)

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Bourassa (2017)

<sup>25</sup> Roberts (2007)

<sup>26</sup> Akiyama et al (2013)

argue that the leadership discourse has shifted towards more ‘collective’ theories of leadership<sup>27</sup>. This is apparently better suited to dealing with complex environmental problems<sup>28</sup>. In the literature there are several definitions of collective leadership, but broadly it can be described as a group of people working together toward a shared goal<sup>29</sup>. Collective leadership acknowledges different cultural and social perspectives to deal with complex issues<sup>30</sup>. There is also an increasing emphasis on social and emotional competencies and the ability to lead through authenticity rather than by authority<sup>31</sup>.

According to Northouse (2012), leadership can be viewed in several ways:

- as a trait – “a distinguishing quality of an individual, which is often inherited”;
- as an ability – having “the capacity to lead”;
- as a skill or competency – “to accomplish the task efficiently”;
- as a behaviour – “what leaders do”;
- as a relationship – “a process of collaboration that occurs between leaders and followers”;
- and as an influence process – “whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (pp. 4,5)<sup>32</sup>.

Northouse’s definition, however, emphasises the influence process, arguing that the interaction between the leader and followers to achieve an agreed outcome is more important than the trait or ability of the leader<sup>33</sup>. Akiyama et al (2013)<sup>34</sup> also emphasise leadership as a process, defining the contemporary view of leadership as “*a process of influence that occurs within the context of relationships between leaders and followers, and involves establishing vision, aligning resources, and providing inspiration to achieve mutual interest*” (pp. 22,23). This shift in attention towards the process of leadership originally comes from Burns’ (1978) seminal work describing transactional and transformational leadership<sup>35</sup>.

### **Defining youth leadership**

There are various theories within academic literature investigating leadership, the roles and qualities of leaders, and whether leadership is inherent or can be developed. Another layer of complexity is added in examining *youth* leadership specifically, tied to other ideas such as youth development, citizenship, youth engagement and participation<sup>36</sup>.

Kahn et al (2009) propose a definition of youth leadership: “Young people empowered to inspire and mobilise themselves and others towards a common purpose, in response to personal and/or social

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> Brinkerhoff et al (2015)

<sup>30</sup> Akiyama et al (2013)

<sup>31</sup> Kahn et al. (2009)

<sup>32</sup> Northouse (2012), cited in Armstrong & Gough (2019)

<sup>33</sup> Armstrong & Gough (2019)

<sup>34</sup> Akiyama, An, Furumai & Katayama H. (2013)

<sup>35</sup> Burns (1978)

<sup>36</sup> Kahn et al. (2009)

issues and challenges, to effect positive change” (pp.18). Kahn et al (2009) note that although developing a specific definition may not be necessary or ideal in the context of practice, it is helpful as part of efforts to build a conceptual framework of what youth leadership means and what it can offer young people, which in turn will be imperative to navigate best practice in this area.

In attempting to define youth leadership, van Linden & Fertman (1998) define both adult and youth leaders as “those ... who think for themselves, communicate their thoughts and feelings to others, and help others understand and act on their own beliefs; they influence others in an ethical and socially responsible way” (p. 30<sup>37</sup>). Although perhaps written before the term ‘influencer’ was part of the common lexicon, this definition could apply to a modern day (generally online) influencer as much as a leader, although influencers, in the present use of the term, are not necessarily promoting ethical or socially responsible behaviours. Other definitions often include influencing as a part of leadership, together with other factors.

In a study of young leaders, Corriero (2006) defined leadership as “the process of leading, facilitating, mobilising, influencing, energising, organising and guiding people towards a common vision/goal” (p.36)<sup>38</sup>. An earlier study of community leaders (aged 8-28 years) suggested that adolescents are more interested in developing leadership in groups and that leadership is more about “group participation and distribution of knowledge and skills in collaborative efforts towards team defined goals” (Roach et al., 1999, p. 21)<sup>39</sup>.

Developing youth leaders and engaging youth in environmental stewardship has important implications for young people as well as for their communities and society as a whole<sup>40</sup>. A proposed framework for how to develop youth leadership is by providing “opportunities that engage young people in challenging action, around issues that reflect their genuine needs and offer authentic opportunities to make decisions and effect change, in an environment of support in which young people can reflect on their experiences”<sup>41</sup>. Riemer et al. (2013) propose that effective leadership programme activities should “be participatory, teach participants to impact change in the community context, and be based on best practices”<sup>42</sup>.

### **Empowerment as a process**

Empowerment is considered a process through which individuals, communities and organisations gain control over issues and problems that concern them most<sup>43</sup>. This process is about encouraging and enabling the participation of particular individuals/groups (such as young people) in activities that enhance control and create opportunities for them to learn, improve knowledge, raise consciousness, increase skills and access to resources<sup>44</sup>. Youth empowerment is therefore considered an essential prerequisite for developing youth leadership. The literature identifies ‘levels of empowerment’<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Armstrong & Gough (2019)

<sup>38</sup> Cited by Armstrong & Gough (2019)

<sup>39</sup> Armstrong & Gough (2019)

<sup>40</sup> Browne, Garst & Bialeschki (2011), Bourassa (2017)

<sup>41</sup> Kahn et al. (2009)

<sup>42</sup> Bourassa (2017)

<sup>43</sup> Kar et al (1999)

<sup>44</sup> Zimmerman (1995)

<sup>45</sup> Kar et al. (1999)

which could be applied to ‘youth empowerment’. For example, empowerment can be considered as a multilevel construct that can be understood in relation to three interdependent levels<sup>46</sup>:

- Psychological empowerment is premised on individuals gaining self-confidence and consciousness of the problems they may face and becoming self-sufficient in addressing them.
- Community empowerment is about enhancing communities’ resources through leadership development and by building strong networks and communication systems.
- Organisational empowerment aims to build a power base and enhance resources of community-based organisations that aim to ‘protect, promote and advocate for the powerless’, which may include marginalised groups.

### **Environmental leadership**

No one leadership theory is universally accepted in the context of environmental leadership. Research has shown that transformational leadership, whereby transformational leaders prompt followers to act for certain goals and create a vision that represents values and motivations of both leaders and followers<sup>47</sup>, often features strongly in studies of environmental leaders. However, it can be argued that collective leadership that incorporates both cultural and social perspectives is better suited to dealing with complex environmental problems<sup>48</sup>.

Emmons (1997) defines positive environmental action as “a deliberate strategy that involves decisions, planning, implementation, and reflection ... to achieve a specific positive environmental outcome” (p. 35)<sup>49</sup>. Environmental actions carried out by engaged citizens with the intention of effecting collective environmental behaviours and actions can contribute to a shift towards a culture of sustainability<sup>50</sup>. Influencing others to engage with environmental issues (i.e. showing environmental leadership) has been shown to be distinct from individual-level environmental behaviours such as recycling or saving water<sup>51</sup>. Individual behaviours are less likely to be carried out with the intention of influencing environmental engagement at the societal level<sup>52</sup>. Action creates change, whereas behaviour is usually responsive and may only perpetuate accepted norms<sup>53</sup>.

Browne, Garst and Bialeschki (2011) define ‘environmental stewards’ as environmentally conscious leaders who promote sustainability in others<sup>54</sup>. Environmental stewardship can therefore be inferred to involve engaging in environmental action. In exploring what influences young people to take environmental action, Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009) define a young environmental leader as “*an individual between the ages of 16 and 19 years who met four criteria: a positive attitude toward the*

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<sup>46</sup> Kar et al. (1999)

<sup>47</sup> Burns (1978); Akiyama et al (2013)

<sup>48</sup> Akiyama et al. (2013)

<sup>49</sup> Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009)

<sup>50</sup> Bourassa (2017)

<sup>51</sup> Alisat & Riemer (2015) as cited by Bourassa (2017)

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*

<sup>53</sup> Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009)

<sup>54</sup> Browne, Garst & Bialeschki (2011)

*environment, positive environmental behaviour, initiative or leadership activity, and involvement in multiple spheres of action (Tanner, 1998)”.*

### What frameworks for youth empowerment and leadership development exist?

The Our Bright Future evaluation [Baseline and Context Report](#) and [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#), identified various frameworks that have been used to conceptualise empowerment in terms of the processes and/or steps involved (e.g. personal development, capacity building) and the outcomes that might be expected (e.g. increased understanding of the socio-political environment)<sup>55</sup>.

Hart (1992) proposed a Ladder of Youth Participation, with eight different levels of participation, the top two of which correspond with a degree of youth leadership in that they represent situations where projects are initiated by young people, with varying levels of support from adults. The ‘ladder’ proposed by Hart suggests a linear progression is possible between levels of participation (and by inference leadership).

Treseder (1997)<sup>56</sup> suggests a reworking of Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation model, including the stipulation that young people will not necessarily be able to take an active role in directing projects immediately and that they require appropriate empowerment first, in order to fully participate. This is reflected in the findings of the [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#), with most projects reporting (through interviews) the need to build participants leadership skills gradually in a supported environment, for example using a mentoring approach<sup>57</sup>. Treseder challenged the notion of a progressive hierarchy in developing participation and instead suggested five conditions are required, including: access to those in power; access to relevant information; real choices between different options; support from a trusted independent person; and, a means of appeal if things go wrong.

Hickman et al. (2016) developed a theory for youth engagement that informed the Youth Leading Environmental Change (YLEC) programme implemented across six countries (Riemer et al., 2016)<sup>58</sup>. Riemer et al. (2016) and Hickman et al. (2016) propose that to be able to engage in environmental action, youth need: a) comprehension; b) motivation; c) confidence; and d) opportunities for engagement<sup>59</sup>.

Armstrong & Gough (2019, p.9) propose that there are five levels of adolescent leadership for sustainability. These are:

1. *“Eco-citizen: Moderately committed to sustainability, will take actions to model sustainability at home, youth groups and at school, but may have limited understanding of sustainability and practical opportunities for leadership. Or takes actions, has a very good understanding of sustainability and leadership, but for either personal reasons or lack of opportunity is unable to lead at a higher level.*

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<sup>55</sup> Jennings (2006); Zimmerman (1995).

<sup>56</sup> Treseder (1997)

<sup>57</sup> ERS & CEP (2017), page 118 paragraph 10.46

<sup>58</sup> Bourassa (2017)

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*

2. **Initiator:** *Highly committed to a particular sustainability issue and shows great tenacity in conducting a particular project about that issue. Is developing capabilities, attributes, understandings and practice through the project.*
3. **Apprentice:** *Interested in sustainability and belonging to a sustainability group, club or committee. Motivated to develop understandings and learn from others.*
4. **Change Agent:** *Growing passion for sustainability and ability to hold leadership positions within a sustainability group, club or committee. Works collaboratively with others. Takes on increasing responsibilities and initiatives. Or unable to join or form a sustainability group (for personal reasons or through lack of opportunity), but leads by coaching others.*
5. **Connector:** *Exceptional leader, passionate about sustainability, has had extensive practice in leading sustainability and has a deep understanding about leadership and sustainability. Demonstrates high levels of capabilities and attributes to lead significant sustainability initiatives".<sup>60</sup>*

Armstrong & Gough (2019) present a 'Development Framework for Adolescent Leadership' that provides several instruments across these five levels of adolescent leadership for sustainability<sup>61</sup>.

The Mayor of London's Young Londoners Fund is currently developing a youth participation toolkit to share practical ways in which to engage young people in project design, development and delivery, so that they are listened to and empowered<sup>62</sup>.

From the different frameworks described above a theme is that it is not just personal attributes such as motivation and confidence that are important for youth leadership but also the opportunities that are available to young people. For example, motivation alone is not enough for a young person to reach the higher levels of adolescent leadership for sustainability<sup>63</sup>, they also need opportunities to form valuable connections and the experience to be able to influence meaningful change. The research and analysis for this thematic study has sought to understand if the Our Bright Future projects included subscribe to any of these or reflect similar frameworks for youth empowerment / environmental leadership.

### What types of engagement approaches and activities empower youth leadership?

Although there is no one-size-fits-all solution to effective youth leadership programmes, Kahn et al (2009) identify a number of common successful characteristics and practices. This includes opportunities to engage young people in challenging action around issues that reflect their own interests and needs and that offer authentic opportunities to affect change. Further, this should be in an environment of support in which young people can build confidence and reflect on their

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<sup>60</sup> Armstrong & Gough (2019)

<sup>61</sup> Armstrong & Gough (2019)

<sup>62</sup> London Assembly website (2020) <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/education-and-youth/young-londoners/mayors-young-londoners-fund/resources#acc-i-56996>

<sup>63</sup> Armstrong and Gough (2019)

experiences<sup>64</sup>. Zimmerman et al. also argue that engaging young people in activities that they choose and have control over, helps them gain confidence and important skills to become ‘productive and healthy adults’<sup>65</sup>. These skills may include leadership capabilities. These approaches to encouraging youth leadership reflect strongly the approaches taken by Our Bright Future projects as reported in the [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#).

Promoting organisational structures and cultures that facilitate young people to work alongside adults in decision-making fosters an overall sense of connectedness and engagement, which can promote positive youth development and empowerment<sup>66</sup>. However, achieving meaningful power-sharing among adults and young people can be difficult<sup>67</sup>. Although ‘youth-driven’ organisational models have been found to be most successful in terms of benefits to the organisation and empowering participants, this can be time consuming and difficult to sustain<sup>68</sup>. Youth-driven models include organisational structures where young people might be: frequently hired as staff, including supervisory and managerial positions; involved in hiring and evaluation of peers and adult staff; encouraged and supported to sit on boards; involved in fund raising; and serving on committees<sup>69</sup>.

The Our Bright Future Baseline and Context report<sup>70</sup> identified that the extent to which young people were considered or expected to be involved in project delivery varied between projects. In part, this is influenced by the nature of each project and the type and duration of young peoples’ participation (e.g. one-off engagement, weeks or years). Despite most projects emphasising that activities would be ‘youth-led’, there appears to be no common definition or understanding of what this means or how it will be realised in practice<sup>71</sup>. The [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#) concluded that, ‘based on evidence from project quarterly and annual reporting and interviews, the majority of projects have provided both formal and informal opportunities for young people to take the lead in project settings’<sup>72</sup>. At the Mid-Term point the evidence suggested that projects were adopting a range of approaches rather than a common approach. This reflects their diversity in terms of objectives and participant profile (e.g. age) and background.

### ***Types of engagement approaches and activities that empower youth to engage with environmental actions and environmental leadership***

According to Benton *et al* (2007), direct aesthetic and physical experiences with nature, environmental restoration activities, emotional content, a multisensory learning environment, and providing relevant and personal information to promote ownership and empowerment are examples of programme strategies that are most successful for strengthening environmental attitudes<sup>73</sup>. Hickman et al. (2016) show that characteristics of youth leadership programmes that are effective at influencing

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<sup>64</sup> Kahn et al. (2009)

<sup>65</sup> Zimmerman et al (2011)

<sup>66</sup> Browne, Garst & Bialeschki (2011)

<sup>67</sup> Kahn et al. (2009)

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*

<sup>70</sup> ERS & CEP (2017)

<sup>71</sup> ERS & CEP (2017)

<sup>72</sup> ERS & CEP (2017), paragraph 10.44

<sup>73</sup> Ernst et al. (2017)

environmental actions include fostering systems thinking, encouraging personal reflection, building action competence, and providing a role model<sup>74</sup>.

Arnold, Cohen & Warner (2009) conducted interviews with 12 young people to explore what influences they perceive to have contributed to their current involvement in environmental action. The main influences identified included parents, outdoors experiences in childhood, friends, role models, teachers, and youth groups and gatherings. In every case, participants' relations with other influential and passionate people combined with powerful experiences were crucial to them becoming young environmental leaders<sup>75</sup>.

Similarly, according to Tindall (2019), having social network ties and receiving encouragement to participate is a very strong predictor of who will get involved in environmental activism such as mass mobilisation, regardless of how old participants are. Both young people and adults can be influenced by others to get involved in protests. Youth leaders actively mobilise others (either other youths or adults) to become involved in environmental activism and environmental behaviours<sup>76</sup>. Young leaders can increase the environmental engagement of others in a number of ways: influencing environmental knowledge and attitudes, personal practices (e.g. recycling), and participation and leadership actions<sup>77</sup>.

Browne, Garst & Bialeschki (2011) assessed the camp to grow (C2G) programme<sup>78</sup> that aimed to foster participants' environmental stewardship and to empower them to engage in organised efforts to promote environmental sustainability in their homes and communities. The C2G programme consisted of leadership skill-building lessons, opportunities to spend meaningful time in nature, opportunities to engage in critical thinking around nature-based problem solving, and opportunities to take action to solve important environmental issues. The evaluation found that C2G effectively fostered several aspects of leadership and environmental stewardship, including personal leadership skills (specifically independence and problem-solving confidence), affinity for nature, and empowerment<sup>79</sup>.

Environmental stewardship requires a person to feel strongly about protecting the environment and these feelings are thought to emerge from an affinity for nature. Educational opportunities designed specifically to connect children to nature typically achieve this outcome and encourage youth to participate in environmental efforts<sup>80</sup>.

### ***Gaps and challenges to engaging young people in leadership programmes***

Some gaps and challenges to getting young people involved in leadership programmes identified in the literature include<sup>81</sup>:

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<sup>74</sup> Bourassa (2017)

<sup>75</sup> Arnold, Cohen and Warner (2009)

<sup>76</sup> Tindall (2019)

<sup>77</sup> Bourassa (2017)

<sup>78</sup> Camp 2 Grow environmental leadership programme (USA): <https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/articles/camp-2-grow-teaching-leadership-environmental-stewardship-new-york-city-youth>

<sup>79</sup> Browne, Garst & Bialeschki (2011)

<sup>80</sup> *ibid*

<sup>81</sup> Kahn et al. (2009)

- Practical constraints to access including lack of accessible facilities, lack of information about opportunities, cost of programmes or materials and the time commitments required by the programme.
- Elitism of access where the young people selected as participants of leadership programmes are from more educated and included groups of society, reflecting the adults working to ‘empower’ them, rather than being included for talent or ability. Research has found that young people may sometimes feel that leadership is not open to people of their ethnicity, faith, gender or socioeconomic background.
- Low aspirations and expectations can be a key barrier to engaging certain groups of young people. One way to overcome this and encourage participation is by providing examples of success of young people who have come from similar backgrounds and identities.
- Young people not identifying with a leadership role or having negative associations with leadership, or negative peer pressure that deters young people from participating may also be barriers to engagement.

### What skills and competencies do (young) people need to become environmental leaders?

According to research, leadership is becoming increasingly situational and seen as a collaborative, social and relational activity<sup>82</sup>. Because of this, researchers argue that social and emotional skills and competencies such as communication, self-discipline, flexibility, creativity, and emotional intelligence that help develop interpersonal relationships are crucial<sup>83</sup>.

Campbell (2019) notes a number of characteristics specific to environmental leaders, identified by research conducted since 2000. Environmental leaders are defined by having concern for the welfare of others and the environment, and desire to motivate change within their organisation (Egri and Herman, 2000)<sup>84</sup>. Evans et al (2015) identify charisma, strength, commitment/perseverance, and reputation as desirable personality traits of leaders within the environmental sciences literature. In addition to these values, environmental leaders will purportedly demonstrate particular leadership behaviours. Research suggests that they “*operate as multi-talented ‘master managers’ who simultaneously perform a wide variety of leadership and managerial roles*”<sup>85</sup>. In addition, environmental leaders share their own knowledge and ideas about solving environmental problems (Akiyama et al, 2013)<sup>86</sup>. A space to facilitate this sharing is essential. While young environmental leaders would not be expected to have developed all of these traits (e.g. operating as ‘master managers’), elements of these wider traits of environmental leadership may already be fostered in young people.

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<sup>82</sup> Kahn et al. (2009)

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*

<sup>84</sup> Campbell (2019)

<sup>85</sup> Evans et al. (2015)

<sup>86</sup> Campbell (2019)

The evaluation of the C2G programme demonstrated that youth feel empowered to engage in community efforts when they have both the skills and the belief in the importance of the issue<sup>87</sup>. Youth development outcomes such as independence, problem solving, affinity for nature, and empowerment are also important to youth engagement in environmental stewardship<sup>88</sup>.

### What research exists into young people’s participation in environmental activism? What does it say?

Recent years have seen a resurgence in environmental and climate activism, in particular among young people and often related to and facilitated by information shared or accessed by social media and mobile technology. Environmental activism may be one way that young people take environmental action. Engagement of young people in activism may be partly explained by ‘biographical availability’, whereby young people are more flexible in terms of schedules and less susceptible to sanctions such as being fired from a job (McAdam, 2017)<sup>89</sup>. Tindal argues that another reason why young people engage in climate activism is that they are not as tied to the status quo as older generations<sup>90</sup>.

Turns (2019) interviewed seven young people who have taken up climate activism, speaking to them about what instigated their passion and empowered them to take action. There is a common theme throughout the interviews with young environmental activists: the want for better environmental education as several of the youth activists interviewed say that this is key factor driving them to engage in activism<sup>91</sup>. Swedish climate youth activist Greta Thunberg also appears to have inspired several of the climate activists interviewed by Turns (2019), including teenagers Harriet and Milou from Victoria, Australia, who started the Australian school climate strike in November 2018 after seeing Greta lead strikes in Sweden<sup>92</sup>. As Naomi Klein has previously noted, young people have found a sense of agency in the school strikes, and in Thunberg’s insistence that no one is too small to make a difference<sup>93</sup>.

### Conclusions

‘Youth’ leadership adds an extra layer of complexity to the already diverse literature on defining leadership. A key element of developing leadership more generally that is equally relevant to youth leadership is having in place a process of empowerment that enables people to become leaders and affect positive change. Many Our Bright Future projects are explicitly seeking to provide support and processes to empower participating young people, and this thematic study has sought to explore these.

There is a distinction between positive environmental behaviours (e.g. recycling) and environmental actions (e.g. organising/taking part in a recycling campaign). Actions influence others to engage in environmental issues and can lead to positive change at the societal level. Environmental leadership

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<sup>87</sup> Browne, Garst & Bialeschki (2011)

<sup>88</sup> *ibid*

<sup>89</sup> Tindall (2019)

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*

<sup>91</sup> *ibid*

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*

<sup>93</sup> Byrne, Bowman & Buckley (2019)

is about influencing others to engage with environmental issues, including through engaging in environmental action. This thematic study is therefore interested in how Our Bright Future projects have empowered young people to be able to engage in environmental actions.

Young people can be empowered in different aspects of their lives. Involvement in activities that enhance control and create opportunities for young people to learn, improve knowledge, raise consciousness, and that increase skills and access to resources can empower young people to become leaders.

The literature suggests a number of approaches and activities of leadership programmes that empower youth environmental leadership, this includes opportunities that engage young people in challenging action, around issues that reflect their own interests and needs and offer authentic opportunities to affect change. Youth-led organisational structures and those that promote young people working alongside adults have also been found to be most successful in empowering participants. Relationships and interactions with other influential people and role models and experiences in nature have also been found to encourage environmental action and stewardship.

Barriers to young people engaging in leadership programmes also exist. Examples of barriers identified in the literature include: practical constraints such as lack of resources or information about opportunities; elitism of access where participants are selected from more educated groups of society; some young people's perceptions that leadership is not open to people like them (e.g. because of their ethnicity, faith, gender, or socioeconomic background); or negative associations with leadership and peer pressure to not engage.

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