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OUR BRIGHT FUTURE EVALUATION

Key impacts for participants:
employability, social action & well-being

ERS Ltd and Collingwood Environmental Planning

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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 short- to long-term 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 Panel¹ for further in-depth evaluation studies. This included a study of participants designed to examine key impacts of the programme for young people. The specific focus was on impacts of Our Bright Future on young people's employability, relationship with social action and mental health and well-being.



¹ 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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examined **how Our Bright Future has directly affected young people's lives**. Specifically, the research sought to evidence the strength of the link between participation in Our Bright Future and employability, employment, participation in social action, improved well-being and self-confidence. Analysis of this evidence confirms that these are prominent impacts and also provides indications of key factors and activities which have contributed towards them.

The study was intended to **inform the ongoing delivery of Our Bright Future projects** and organisations 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 in practical or theory-based activities.

Informed by a literature review, **an online survey** was developed to gather responses from participants (and ex participants). Responses were received from participants of 25 (of the 31) portfolio projects totalling a final sample of 258 respondents (after data cleansing). This was followed by qualitative **telephone interviews with 12 survey respondents** which contributed to the qualitative data gathered through the survey.

The evidence for this study therefore relates to a small sample of participants, likely to be those most engaged in their projects and with a substantial bias towards those currently or recently engaging. This should be borne in mind when considering the extent of impacts evidenced across the sample. Key findings are summarised below with the full report providing an indication of the extent that these impacts were observed across the sample.

Key findings



Our Bright Future has enhanced participants' employability, increased their aspirations and broadened their awareness of employment opportunities. The study confirmed that Our Bright Future participants have experienced many of the education and employment-related benefits suggested by previous studies on engagement of young people in volunteering and environmental programmes. Participants have been influenced to pursue careers in the environment sector as well as to apply environmental values, skills and interests developed through Our Bright Future to jobs and studies as diverse as fashion and engineering.

"It has opened my eyes to the possibilities and opportunities available in sustainable/environmental sectors and has made me see that there is a place for me and my skillset." Project participant

"I also cannot express my gratitude for the ethos I have acquired to the work I approach because of the time I spent there. I now work with passion which I struggled to previously find and take pride knowing that I am bettering the environment and the world we all share whilst I work." Project participant

"My involvement in the project has opened my eyes to the importance of taking every opportunity you can and running with it." Project participant

Key activities and experiences contributing towards employability and enhanced aspirations:

- Development of transferable, social skills and confidence
- Development of subject-specific knowledge and awareness of career opportunities
- Specific experiences in different contexts e.g. practical conservation and professional situations
- Opportunities to lead and take ownership
- Employment support
- Development of professional networks and opportunities to connect with others.



Our Bright Future has contributed to participants' success in securing employment, self-employment and education opportunities. Participants have gained internships, apprenticeships and employment with the National Trust, National Park Authorities, Natural England, Wildlife Trusts and Groundwork in positions such as rangers and ecologists.

"I applied and secured an internship with the RSPB, and a year later, secured a full-time job with Natural England. I would not have had the confidence or motivation to apply for either, without the renewed energy for environmental change that I got [from Our Bright Future]." Project participant

"[Our Bright Future] gave me the confidence and support to make my social enterprise a reality and escape 9-5 office life to work for a cause and create positive change in my community." Project participant

There are indications that longer term impacts on participants' education and employment destinations have yet to be realised with the majority of participants reporting that the programme influenced their aspirations, hopes and plans for the future relating to their education and career.



Our Bright Future has influenced participants to continue or start volunteering either for organisations involved in the programme or other social and environmentally focussed causes. This was partly as a result of increased appreciation of the personal benefits of volunteering and partly due to altruistic motivations. Projects have also given participants confidence to take on voluntary positions on governance and management boards and other roles which they had not previously considered open to them. This included roles on the Young Friends of the Earth England steering group, a local Wildlife Trust youth forum, a Friends of Park group, a school governing board and roles planning various environmental and community activity days.

"It has influenced me to share my opinions on youth engagement with the environment and to do this I have volunteered on a number of boards to help steer the organisations." Project participant



Our Bright Future has influenced participants to engage in further social action and campaigning to influence decisions. In some cases, this was as a result of projects changing participants' attitudes towards campaigning. Participants tended to engage in campaigning at a local rather than a national level and generally focussed around environmental issues including climate change, single use plastics, and wider waste issues. Many had joined existing groups and campaigns while some described producing online content to campaign, using film, photography, social media and online content to share messages. Examples of tangible outcomes arising from these campaigns largely focussed around schools and included establishment of several eco clubs, creation of wildlife gardens and schemes to reduce waste and increase recycling.

"I managed to make a speech in front of people. I definitely wouldn't have been able to do that without my time on the project, it gave me the boost I needed. I had the confidence to stand at the front line and shout down the megaphone words of encouragement for all the people of the streets to hear." Project participant

"Made me feel so much more confident and passionate about pursuing change. It's definitely set me up well as a lifelong activist!" Project participant



Our Bright Future has provided participants with inspiration and confidence to voice their opinion and continue to want to engage with environmental issues. While evidently an impact for participants of all activity types, an increased sense of empowerment was most widely apparent in participants of campaigning and entrepreneurial project activities. Importantly the expectation to continue to engage in social action appears to be sustained for more than 6 months after participation.



Our Bright Future has helped to improve participants' well-being through providing experiences outdoors, in the environment and opportunities for social engagement. Improved well-being was most commonly reported by participants of outdoor practical environmental tasks and apprenticeships or formal learning courses. The latter was found to be particularly important for those who felt isolated or who had experienced poor mental health prior to their participation.

"[Our Bright Future] gave me a space to improve my mental wellbeing, by engaging in something meaningful and enjoying outdoor spaces... I found my confidence increased, my anxiety decreased and I looked forward to each session." Project participant

Interestingly, instead of experiencing 'eco-anxiety'², as discussed in wider literature, learning more about environmental issues and meeting other young people through Our Bright Future projects has served to give participants confidence in their generation and the potential to tackle environmental problems. This has, to a degree, addressed participants' fears, improved their optimism for the future and their reported well-being.



Our Bright Future has developed participants' self-confidence. This appears to be most associated with longer-term engagement (participation for three months or more) in the programme. This outcome was found to be facilitated by the supportive environment provided by projects; social interaction; new experiences and challenges; the development of skills and achieving things. According to respondents, many would not have gained this confidence and other social and emotional competencies without Our Bright Future.

Through Our Bright Future participants have also gained confidence to engage with others socially, speak in public, apply skills and take on new opportunities. Increased confidence is not only a common outcome but has also evidently underpinned various impacts for participants including increased employability and take up of various opportunities, raised ambitions and improved well-being.

Overall conclusions

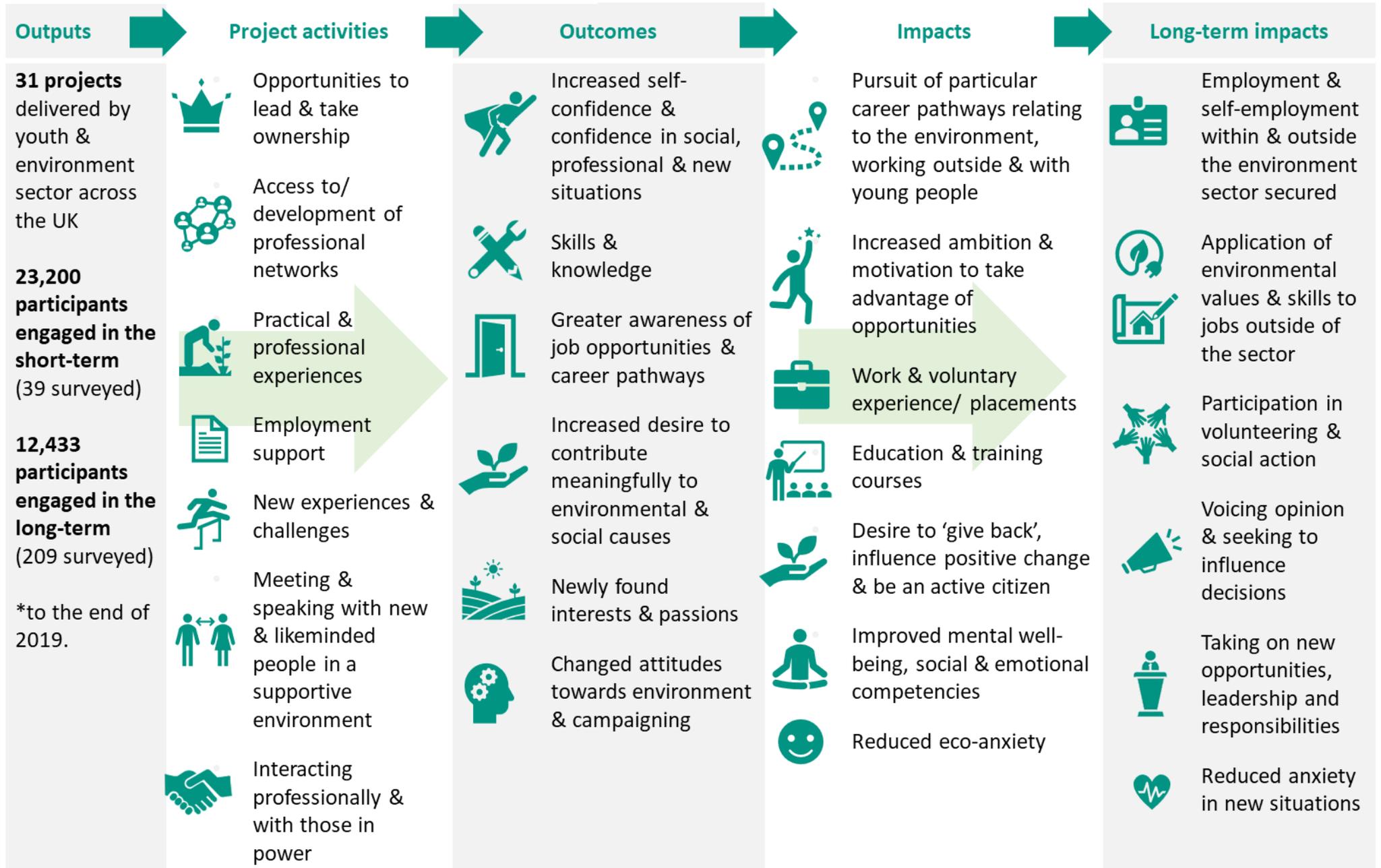
There is no common pathway through Our Bright Future and the 31 different projects vary extensively. However, this study has provided evidence to confirm that **engagement in activities provided by Our Bright Future have valuable education and employment-related benefits for young people** alongside supporting improvements in self-confidence and well-being. As a preface to the report, these confirmed impacts, and the activities which were found to be key in achieving them, are presented in the diagram overleaf. These will be valuable for future interventions to consider.

Based on the evidence collected, **enhancing self-confidence should be considered a central aim of any intervention** since this was found to underpin further positive impacts for young people including progression into education, training, volunteering and employment, as well as improvements to mental health and well-being. Improved self-confidence evidently provides the foundation for personal growth. As such, **key components for incorporation in future interventions include a supportive environment, social interaction, new experiences and challenges, the development of skills and achievements.** Long-term engagement also appears to be more beneficial for self-confidence and well-being benefits than short-term engagement.

These findings are **particularly pertinent considering the recent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic** on the current generation of young people, their education, mental health and employment prospects. Activities such as those provided by Our Bright Future appear to offer a potentially valuable investment opportunity to tackle multiple agendas and challenges relating to young people.

² Extreme worry about current and future harm to the environment caused by human activity and climate change.
<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/how-cope-eco-anxiety>

Logic model map of outcomes and impacts for participants



1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents evidence from a research study examining how participation in Our Bright Future portfolio projects has impacted on young people's employability, relationship with social action, well-being and confidence. Evidence is drawn from the results of an online survey and telephone interviews with Our Bright Future participants and alumni undertaken between April and October 2020. An introduction to the study is followed by a description of the methodology and a brief review of relevant literature. Findings are then presented and finally, overall conclusions.

Rationale and scope of the study

This report forms part of Our Bright Future's programme evaluation and was directly informed by the programme's [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#), published in July 2019. The report presented detailed findings from the evaluation at the mid-term point of programme implementation. This included the presentation of evidence against the programme's four key outcomes³, the first of which focussed on impacts for young people:

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 Mid-Term Evaluation identified a wealth of qualitative evidence from interviews with project managers and visits to projects to indicate that young people have gained a range of new skills and knowledge, and increased their employability (skills, knowledge and attributes that make them more likely to gain employment) through participating in Our Bright Future projects. These outcomes were also found to be closely linked with increased confidence and improved well-being. However, it was recognised that, in many cases, evidence of longer-term impacts for young people was largely based on a relatively small amount of qualitative evidence, with particularly limited evidence obtained directly from participants themselves. This also limited the possibility of drawing conclusions across the portfolio.

It was therefore a recommendation of the Mid-Term Evaluation report to undertake a targeted piece of research across participants of all projects in order to investigate impacts on young people in greater depth. In refining the focus of the research, the Programme's Evaluation Panel expressed specific interest in identifying the role that Our Bright Future had played in terms of young people's employability, career and employment decisions; their relationship with social action (activities which make a positive difference to others or the environment); and long-term changes in well-being and confidence.

In response to this, a discrete study on the programme's participants and alumni (previous participants) was undertaken between April and October 2020. For ease of reporting, these research participants are simply referred to as participants throughout this report, incorporating those both still involved in their projects and those who had left Our Bright Future.

³ For other outcomes, see website: www.ourbrightfuture.co.uk/about/our-vision/

Methodology overview

Full details of the methodology for the study are provided in [Appendix A](#) and a profile of research participants in [Appendix B](#). An overview is provided below.

The study was informed by a literature review ([Appendix C](#)) on the impacts for young people of engagement in volunteering, environmental projects and nature, specifically on employability and well-being. To avoid repetition, the review focussed on literature produced since the programme's Baseline and Context Report.

Informed by the review, an online survey was developed to gather responses from participants (and ex participants). This was distributed by project managers. Responses were received from participants of 25 (of the 31) portfolio projects totalling a final sample of 258 respondents (after data cleansing). This was followed by qualitative telephone interviews with 12 survey respondents which contributed to the qualitative data gathered through the survey and were also used to develop 9 participant case studies (full versions available in [Appendix E](#)).

The reach of the survey was substantially restricted by the limited availability of, and access to contact details for participants and alumni of projects. The evidence for this study therefore relates to a small sample of participants, likely to be those most engaged in their projects and with a substantial bias towards those currently or recently engaging. This should be borne in mind when considering the extent of impacts evidenced across the sample.

In addition, future programmes of a similar nature/ length seeking to evidence the impacts of their activities should maintain a database of alumni contact details to allow for follow-up with participants for the purpose of evaluation. A greater response rate would provide increased confidence in results.

Research questions

Based on a review of literature, the programme's Baseline and Context Report⁴ indicated that a broad spectrum of impacts might result from young people's participation in Our Bright Future. Informed by this and more recent evidence, the following research questions were developed.

- 1. To what extent and in what ways has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' career decisions and their progression in education, training, employment or self-employment?**
- 2. To what extent, and in what ways, has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' subsequent engagement in volunteering, social action and campaigning?**
- 3. To what extent, and in what ways, has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' well-being and confidence?**

The following chapter presents the findings of the primary research by each key research question.

⁴ [Our Bright Future Baseline and Context Report](#), ERS Ltd and CEP (2017)

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Q1. To what extent and in what ways has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' career decisions and their progression in education, training, employment or self-employment?

Summary:

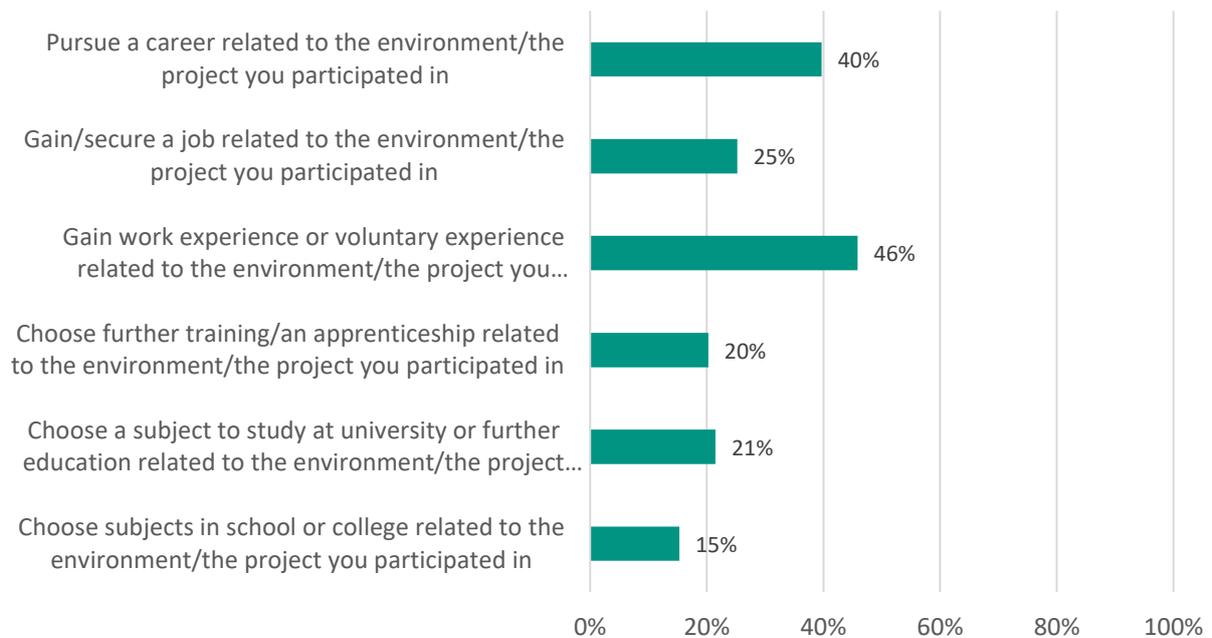
- Our Bright Future has had some level of influence on the education, employment and career choices of the majority of respondents.
- Participating in Our Bright Future projects has increased participants' aspirations, hopes and plans for the future. However, longer-term impacts on participants' education and employment destinations have yet to be realised as a greater majority indicate that their future plans (compared to their current roles) have been influenced by the programme.
- Participants have been influenced by Our Bright Future projects to pursue particular career paths as well as increasing the scale of their ambitions and motivation to take advantage of opportunities available to them.
- Greater proportions of participants who engaged in apprenticeship, campaigning and entrepreneurial activities were influenced to pursue a career or secure a job related to the environment/their project, compared to outdoor practical environmental and work experience activities. The careers of those over the age of 18 were also more widely influenced than those aged 18 or younger.
- Some participants have secured work, apprenticeships and training opportunities since participating in portfolio projects and strongly attribute their success to Our Bright Future increasing their employability.
- There are numerous intrinsic and external factors identified to have supported participants to increase their employability, including the development of skills, knowledge and confidence; opportunities to lead and the development of professional networks.
- As well as securing jobs and education opportunities within the environment sector, there are examples of participants applying environment values, skills and interests developed through Our Bright Future to subjects as diverse as fashion and engineering. Some also continue to operate their own businesses developed through and as a result of Our Bright Future.
- Increased confidence is a key outcome for participants and underpins numerous other outcomes and impacts through contributing to increased employability, ambitions to strive for various careers, education, employment and self-employment opportunities and individuals realising their potential in these positions.

Headline results

The survey results presented in Figure 2.1 show the extent to which Our Bright Future projects played a role in specific education and employment choices of respondents. Overall, 78% of respondents selected at least one action, indicating these impacts were widespread across the sample.

Figure 2.1 Impacts on participants' employment and education choices and destinations

Has your participation in your Our Bright Future project influenced you to do any of the following? [select all that apply] Base: 242 (78% selected at least one)

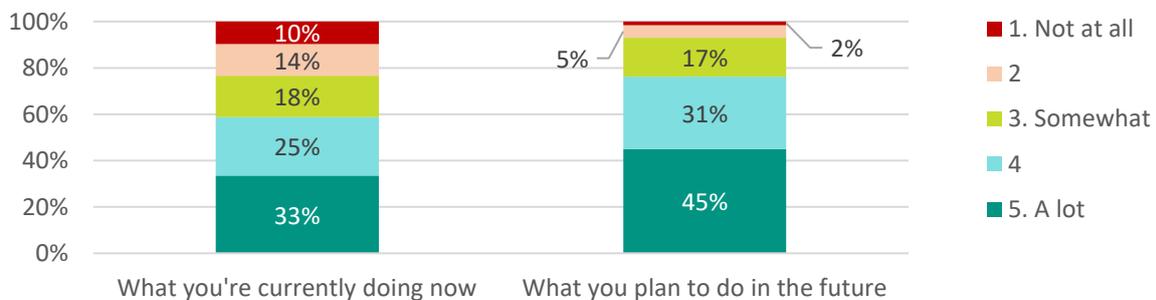


Respondents were subsequently asked, 'to what extent did your Our Bright Future project influence these choices?⁵', on a scale of 1-5 where 1= 'Not at all' and 5= 'A lot'. Further reinforcing the importance of the programme on participants' decisions, 76% stated a '5' or a '4' and just 6% stated '2' or '1' (base: 218).

Figure 2.2 further indicates that Our Bright Future had influenced more than half of respondents in terms of what they were doing at the time of the survey.

Figure 2.2 Level of influence on educational choices and career path

In terms of your educational choices/ career path and volunteering work, to what extent has Our Bright Future influenced...? Base: 257



⁵ (for example, compared to other things which may have influenced you)

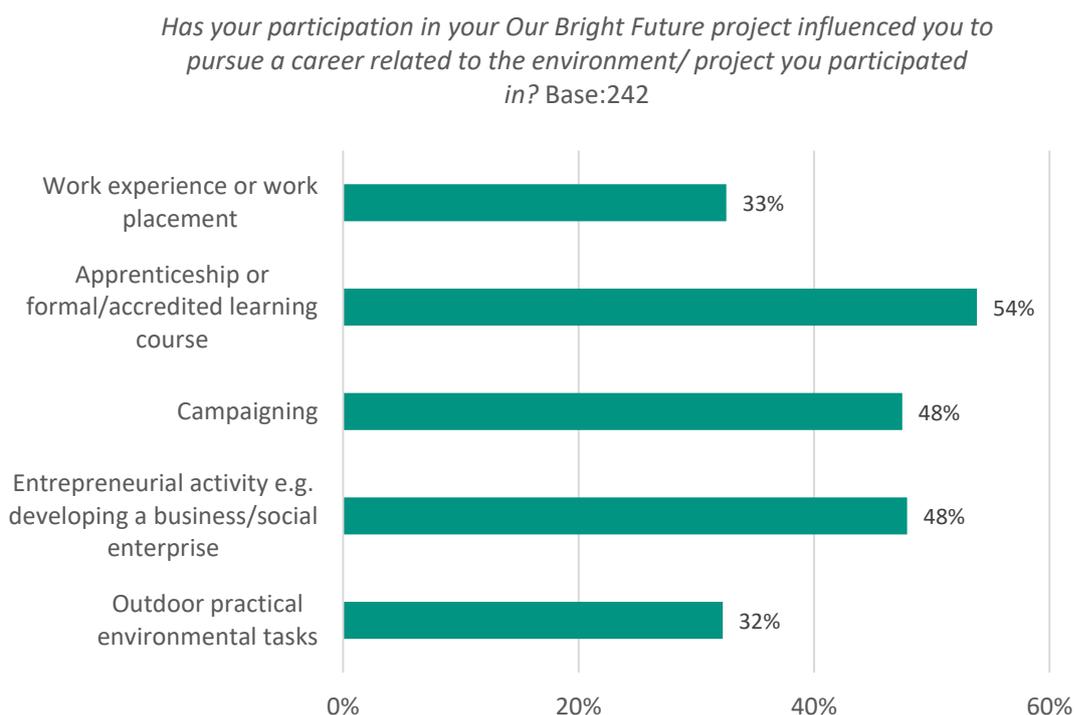
Importantly, Figure 2.2 also shows that an even greater majority of respondents reported that their plans for the future had been influenced by the programme. It is important to recognise that this discrepancy may in part have been influenced by the outbreak of COVID-19 (shortly prior to the survey launch) and its impact on the employment market. Some respondents specifically referred to their plans -and even previously secured work and voluntary placements- being delayed or complicated by the pandemic and leading them to postpone their plans temporarily.

Influence on career aspirations and future plans

As shown in Figure 2.1, Our Bright Future was widely reported by participants to have influenced their desire for a career in the environment sector or, in some cases, related to their project. This is despite responses to another question revealing that the majority of respondents already had an interest in the environment prior to joining the programme⁶.

Figure 2.3 shows the proportion of participants involved in different activities⁷ that indicated their project had career impacts for them. Evidently pursuing a career related to the environment/a project was an impact most commonly reported among those participating in apprenticeships/formal learning courses. This appears to be a less common impact of those engaged in outdoor practical environmental tasks or work experience.

Figure 2.3 Influence on participant careers and outcome of securing a job by project type (base:242)



Examining this impact by age, almost half (45%) of those over the age of 18 reported that Our Bright Future had influenced them to pursue a career compared to 22% of those aged 18 or under. Comparing the results by length of engagement, only a slightly greater proportion of those engaged

⁶ Q: To what extent were you already interested in the environment prior to participation in your Our Bright Future project on a scale of 1-5 where 5= A lot, 3=Somewhat and 1= Not at all? 79% gave a rating of 4 or 5. Base:241

⁷ 45% reported they had been engaged in more than one of the five project activity types.

over the long-term (38%) indicated that the programme had influenced their career compared to those engaged in the short-term (33%)⁸.

The influence on participants' career aspirations appeared to be linked to various outcomes including:

	a newly found interest or enjoyment in the environment, working with young people, in the outdoors or around a specific subject;
	greater awareness of the environmental sector, job opportunities and pathways available;
	an increased desire to contribute meaningfully to environmental and social causes;
	increased self-confidence; and
	greater confidence in skills/knowledge backed up by experience gained on the project.

Example responses of how Our Bright Future projects have influenced participants' career decisions and aspirations are shown below.

"It's definitely one of the reasons I've gone down this route. I wouldn't have ever known you could be a beekeeper as a full-time job and now that's what I'm trying to do. I may have got into it as a hobby but this shown I can do it as a career." Project participant

"I am more informed about employment in the environmental sector, and now understand that environmental careers don't have to be linked to science, but can involve advocacy and campaigning amongst other things. I am therefore far more open to the option of a career in environmentalism" Project participant

"Whilst I was already pursuing a career in conservation/ ecology, the scheme made me realise how much I enjoyed interacting with children as part of environmental education. The experience is I believe going to play a pivotal role in a current job application." Project participant

"It has opened my eyes to the possibilities and opportunities available in sustainable/environmental sectors, and has made me see that there is a place for me and my skillset." Project participant

"Having a range of tasks allowed me to see which I prefer and has made me realise that I really enjoy environmental education which I did not know before the placement." Project participant

The specificity of career ambitions described by respondents varied, in part likely to correspond with the different life stages of respondents. Many described remaining uncertain about exactly what role they wished to take while projects had allowed others to refine their interests. For example, careers which respondents reported seeking included reference to areas as diverse as sustainability, policy change, advocacy and campaigning, conservation, horticulture, environmental education and ecological consultancy.

⁸ This differs slightly to the overall results as not all respondents answered both questions.

Respondents reported taking numerous actions towards realising their career aspirations since participating in Our Bright Future. This included:

- choosing to study an environmental subject (e.g. Geography, sustainability, ecology) at A-Level, undergraduate, and postgraduate level;
- choosing to undertake voluntary work in the UK and overseas; and
- applying for work placements, apprenticeships, and paid employment in the sector.

As well as guiding the direction of career aspirations, the majority (84%) of respondents indicated that Our Bright Future had improved their aspirations and hopes for the future (Base: 251). This appeared to be slightly more common among those who participated in entrepreneurial activities and apprenticeships (92% and 93% correspondingly rated this a '5' or a '4') compared to other activities (where between 81% and 83% did so). Respondents further elaborated that Our Bright Future had served to increase their ambition, motivation and attitude towards work, learning, and opportunities available to them.

This relates somewhat to a finding of the Mid-Term Evaluation that Our Bright Future increased some participants' motivation to learn and improved their relationship with education. Within the Mid-Term report, it was speculated that it was being outdoors in an alternative learning environment that supported this impact. However, it is clear from this study's evidence that, in fact, attitudes towards learning and work resulted more broadly from confidence gained, finding inspiration and a passion.

For some, the confidence they gained through Our Bright Future meant they entered (or re-entered) higher education or employment, while for others it related to a great motivation to seize available opportunities. The following quotes provide examples.

"my involvement in the project has opened my eyes to the importance of taking every opportunity you can and running with it" Project participant

"I really enjoyed and found my teacher to be very inspiring in many ways. The main thing I found from the course was an inspiration to continue to learn new things" Project participant

"I'd struggled to achieve well academically at uni and as a result, faced a lot of adversity when looking for meaningful work and getting my foot on the early career ladder... I applied for and was accepted onto the Environmental Leadership programme with UpRising. In the 9 months that followed, I was able to rebuild the confidence that I had lost, re-find my passion and sense of excitement for the future and build healthy mental habits and skills" Project participant

"I also cannot express my gratitude for the ethos I have acquired to the work I approach because of the time I spent there. I now work with passion which I struggled to previously find and take pride knowing that I am bettering the environment and the world we all share whilst I work." Project participant

Increased employability as a result of participation in Our Bright Future

At the time of the survey, just under a third of respondents reported that Our Bright Future helped them to secure a job in the environment sector/related to their project. Many directly attributed this to Our Bright Future increasing their employability and as well as their optimism towards their job and career prospects.

In particular, opportunities to gain comparable practical experience in the environment sector were described as difficult to obtain elsewhere and therefore particularly unique to Our Bright Future as well as valuable to participants seeking employment in the sector.

“It really opened up opportunities to me. The environmental aspect was huge. Experience is so hard to come across. Not everyone can afford to do unpaid internships so this was a way to get some of those experiences alongside my job. I could do a full-time job alongside it. It gave me a lot of experiences in a condensed period of time.” Project participant

Respondents referred to including their experience on Our Bright Future projects on their CV and discussing them at interviews for university places and jobs. Introductions to networks, mentors and individuals working in the sector were also described as valuable in accessing employment opportunities within the environment sector. Some individuals considered this to be the most important impact of their participation for them and their future careers.

Overall, the responses of participants appear to confirm several key components of projects identified in the [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#)⁹ as important to employability. The summary from the report has been edited and updated in Figure 2.4 drawing on the findings of this study. The revised summary notably includes the addition of employment support, self-confidence and subject-specific skills and knowledge referred to by respondents of the survey.

Figure 2.4 Factors which support increased employability



The following case study provides an example of how opportunities offered through Avon Wildlife Trust’s Youth Forum (linked to its Our Bright Future project) helped one participant to enhance their employability.

⁹ p59, Figure 7.3

[Ella, Avon Wildlife Trust \(project Youth Forum\) participant](#)

Ella is a self-employed illustrator, young creative and activist. She began volunteering with the Avon Wildlife Trust's (AWT) Youth Forum (linked to Avon and Gloucestershire Our Bright Future project) in March 2020 and was invited to informally lead the AWT's youth forum while a key staff member was furloughed. With the guidance of other staff, Ella led a group of young people to produce content for the AWT's social media once a week.

Through her role, Ella proposed and led on an Instagram take-over on the subject of environmental racism and the need for wildlife conservation to be more inclusive. Ella is also currently working on creating resources for an event coordinated by the AWT and the Bristol Natural History Consortium at which she will also be speaking.

Ella was already an activist and notes that she would have been engaged in issues around nature without the project but recognises that AWT has given her greater access to information and the motivation to create content. The opportunity to participate in the youth forum also helped her to develop her network and gain experience developing content around connections with nature. As a result, she believes she has gained knowledge on wildlife and enhanced her research, leadership and online communication skills.

Having not studied at higher education, Ella feels that she has gained important experience and knowledge through volunteering with the Wildlife Trust that may prove useful, should she seek further study or work in the environment sector. The opportunity has opened her eyes to the work available in environmentalism and given her the confidence to pursue it.

"It established me as a creative who is passionate about wildlife conservation. It's propelled me and given me more credibility" Ella

As an example of how the experience has already helped her, Ella notes that she recently reached the third stage of an interview for an internship position which attracted over 400 applications. She strongly believes that her work with AWT played a significant role in being able to reach that stage. Ella has made connections within the Wildlife Trusts through the project and hopes to further these in future and become better engaged within the team, be that in person or online. She would also ultimately like the opportunity to gain employment with the Wildlife Trusts in future.

RIGHT: Example of Ella's contribution to [Avon Wildlife Trust's Instagram](#) featured in their Climate Justice story highlights



Securing opportunities i.e. places in education and employment

While Our Bright Future has evidently supported participants to increase their employability skills, wider literature suggests that this is easier to observe than attainment and progression into employment. This appears to resonate with the survey results: a quarter of respondents reported that the programme had influenced them to gain work and a fifth to gain an apprenticeship or training relating to the environment of the project they participated in. Confirming that tangible employment outcomes are harder to achieve and evidence, even when the skills and motivation are in place.

These outcomes are lower than those reporting their career had been influenced. However, due to the profile of respondents, it would not be expected for all participants to have progressed into work

or training. Additionally, this is not an explicit objective of projects. Just eight¹⁰ out of 31 Our Bright Future projects originally set a related target and, rather than jobs, the target was for participants to enter into internships, work experience, work placements or apprenticeships as a result of their project. Overall, 48% of respondents who indicated they had gained work/voluntary experience or secured a job related to the environment/ their project were from projects with this target.

It is also important to recognise that over half of survey respondents were in education at the time they undertook the survey and 39% remained active participants in their project, therefore any long-term impacts may be yet to be realised. Therefore, the proportion of respondents reporting that Our Bright Future had supported them to gain employment already is very positive.

The qualitative evidence supports attribution of the role Our Bright Future has played in supporting participants to secure opportunities. Numerous respondents explicitly attributed their success in applications (for both jobs and education courses) to their participation in Our Bright Future projects.

“When applying to uni, I talked about my experiences when bird ringing especially and I believe this enhanced my application”

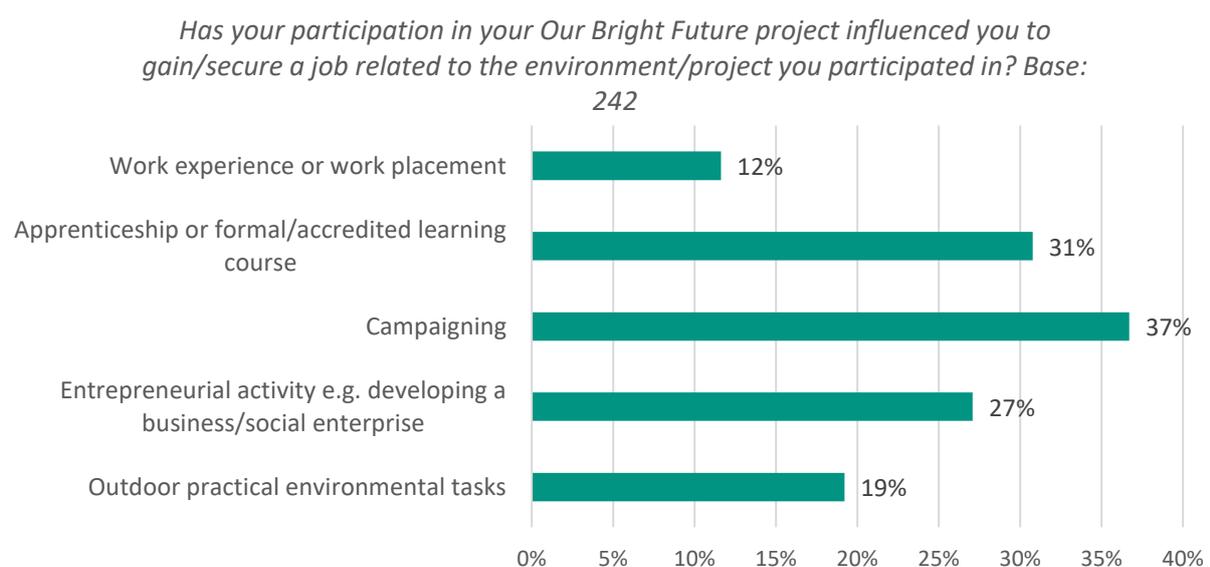
“Our Bright Future has been an invaluable experience for me, giving me many qualifications as well as applied experience, which massively helped secure my future placement.”

“I was applying for a job recently and realised it was 60% stuff I learned on or from the Environmental Leadership Programme and the rest from either my degree or other/workplace learning”

“I applied and secured an internship with the RSPB, and a year later, secured a full-time job with Natural England. I would not have had the confidence or motivation to apply for either, without the renewed energy for environmental change that I got from UpRising.”

While many participants described Our Bright Future as contributing to them securing subsequent opportunities, it is apparent that different types of project had contributed in different ways. Figure 2.5, shows there were considerable differences in the proportion of participants engaged in different activities through their project who reported securing a job.

Figure 2.5 Jobs secured by project activity type



¹⁰ Participants of five of the eight projects responded to the survey.

Securing a job was most widely reported by those engaged in campaigning activities and least commonly reported by those participating in work experience and outdoor environmental tasks. The differences are likely partly related to the age of respondents engaged in the different activities. Over 40% of respondents engaged in outdoor practical tasks and work experience were under the age of 18 at the time of completing the survey. Meanwhile under 18s made up less than a quarter of respondents engaged in entrepreneurial and campaigning activities. With over 18's more likely to be in, or seeking employment, this may at least partly explain why work experiences and outdoor environmental tasks showed the lowest proportion of participants securing jobs.

Qualitative responses also provided insights to how different activities influenced participants to secure jobs, as illustrated below.



Practical environmental activities and work experience offered by Our Bright Future were widely described as complementary to academic studies. While offering participants a key advantage when applying for jobs, wider experiences were also considered important.



Entrepreneurial and campaigning projects were reported to offer a unique opportunity for young people to take leadership and ownership of their own projects. These were widely linked with increased confidence, self-belief and ambitions to secure future opportunities, including leadership positions.



Projects hosting events and seminars offered young people opportunities to meet with professionals and develop their networks which had supported some individuals to secure jobs. Seeing what others had achieved also served to give participants confidence to follow similar pathways or strive for similar positions.

These variations are demonstrated particularly well by the case studies. For example, the experience of Gethin on North Wales Wildlife Trust's Our Wild Coast project is described overleaf. This example shows how practical environmental experience gained through Our Bright Future supported Gethin to secure a work placement which he hopes will ultimately support him in securing employment. Importantly, participating in Our Bright Future formed just part of his increased employability, alongside his academic studies.

Gethin, Our Wild Coast participant (North Wales Wildlife Trust)

Gethin had just finished his first year in environmental conservation when he heard about the Our Wild Coast traineeship offered by the North Wales Wildlife Trust. He was struggling to find opportunities to secure practical experience in the field and hoped that the traineeship would offer an insight into working for the North Wales Wildlife Trust as well as boosting his employability.

Gethin feels that the traineeship really complemented the theoretical knowledge he gained in his academic studies through offering practical skills and an insight into marine environments. He also really enjoyed the hands-on aspect of the traineeship and felt that he learnt a lot through constant dialogue with the North Wales Wildlife Trust officers, particularly identifying skills.

Through the traineeship, Gethin was able to gain a number of AQA qualifications and was particularly grateful to gain an RAC certificate in Emergency First Aid at Work for Outdoor Practitioners. He notes that this is ordinarily quite expensive and will benefit him in any future job in the outdoor sector.

“I learnt a lot from my university course over my first year, however, my 2 weeks with the WT was invaluable in teaching me what my academic studies could not; a first-hand understanding of conservation practice. The traineeship was an immersive and hands-on experience, which was complimented perfectly by the theoretical knowledge provided by the professionals who were constantly around us.” Gethin

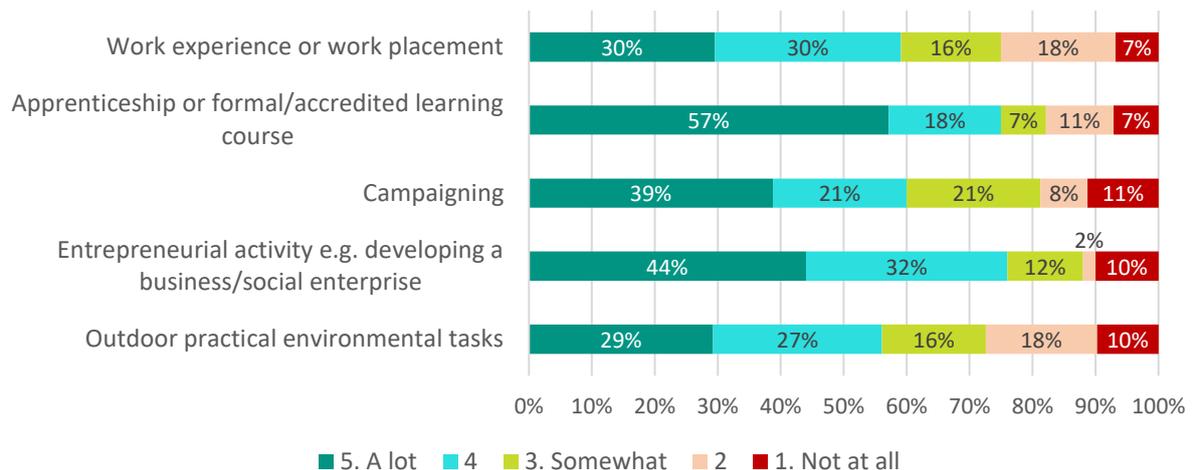
With no other prior experience of conservation, Gethin feels Our Wild Coast was important in giving him the confidence to apply for a work placement as an assistant ecologist. Gethin also feels it ultimately helped him secure the placement as he feels the traineeship satisfied a lot of the desired criteria for the role (e.g. identification skills and working in outdoor environments) and helped him to demonstrate his passion at the interview. He believes that without the traineeship, he would've found it more difficult to secure a placement for his university year in industry and that he wouldn't necessarily have followed a practical ecology route, perhaps instead pursuing something theoretical related to sustainability.

“Our Bright Future has been an invaluable experience for me, giving me many qualifications as well as applied experience, which massively helped secure my future placement... the placement will give me even further insight. It's the domino effect. The initial experience is really hard to get. It's led to my placement, which should help get me in the door.” Gethin

As shown by Figure 2.2, 77% of respondents indicated that Our Bright Future had influenced what they were “currently doing now”, “somewhat” to “a lot” (base:257). The extent to which participants reported this differed by project activity types and is shown in Figure 2.6. As with opportunities secured, these results may have been impacted by the age of participants engaging in each activity.

Figure 2.6 Our Bright Future influence on participants’ current occupations by project activity type

In terms of your educational choices / career path / volunteering work) to what extent has your Our Bright Future project influenced what you're currently doing? Base: 257



It appears that Our Bright Future apprenticeships or formal/accredited learning courses and entrepreneurial activities were particularly influential on participants’ current occupations compared to other project types. Once again, it appears that outdoor practical environmental activities and work experience had the least widespread impact on what participants were currently doing.

Of those who reported that Our Bright Future had influenced what they were currently doing (‘somewhat’ to ‘a lot’, Base: 191), 53% indicated that ‘it’s directly related to the environment’¹¹. In response to this question, and others, a minority provided details of positions they had secured as a result of Our Bright Future. These are detailed overleaf.

¹¹ When asked a multiple-choice question about their professional role or what they were doing currently, 32% responded ‘It’s not directly related to the environment but I’ve brought my knowledge of the environment or sustainability to my role’; and 15% responded ‘It’s not at all related to the environment’.

Roles secured by Our Bright Future participants as reported by survey respondents

- Full-time beekeeper (early stages of self-employment)
- Assistant ranger for the National Trust
- Assistant Ecologist for a private ecological consultancy
- Apprentice with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
- MyPlace Project Officer
- Placement with an ecology firm for a Wildlife Trust
- Position in planning growth & infrastructure
- Apprenticeship in youth work
- Campaigns Intern
- Position in policy and research for Groundwork UK
- Internship with the RPSB Volunteer National Park Authority Warden
- Warden for TCV
- Flood Risk and Draining Team at a local council
- Volunteer Coordinator for Shoresearch Cornwall
- Projects Manager at a charity
- Beekeeping tutor
- Assistant Ecologist
- Internship with the RSPB
- Full-time position with Natural England

Meanwhile, 32% of those who reported that Our Bright Future had influenced what they were currently doing (*somewhat* to *a lot*, Base: 191), indicated that their role was not directly related to the environment but that they brought to it their knowledge of the environment or sustainability. This included the following actions and intentions:



an engineer and an engineering student shifting focus on alternative and renewable technologies with reduced environment impact;



an architecture student incorporating environmental values into their approach;



a participant encouraging their office to reduce unnecessary waste and negative environmental impacts;



a participant applying their knowledge of eco-friendly materials into their fashion designs; and



a participant hoping to incorporate environmental studies and documentary work into their media degree.

Reflecting the comments of other participants, one respondent also commented that their project allowed them *“to be a green ambassador for whatever workplace”* they entered and another was hoping to update their company’s environmental policy. The case study extract overleaf provides a more detailed example of how Brooke, a participant in Impact Arts’ Creative Pathways project has applied the environmental knowledge gained on their project to their further studies in fashion at college.

Brooke, Creative Pathways Environmental Design participant (Impact Arts)



Brooke, 17, had left school and was waiting to apply to further education when he found out about the programmes delivered by Impact Arts and funded by Our Bright Future. The Creative Pathways Environmental Design course is an arts-focused employability programme teaching young people aged 16-19 practical, creative arts skills and encouraging them to think about green issues, while offering them support with job-searching, CV-building and interview skills.

LEFT: Brooke during a Creative Pathways session

Brooke found it interesting learning about the environment and how he could incorporate eco-friendly design, upcycling, recycling and reuse into his fashion designs. He learnt about using waste materials as well as sustainable materials such as bamboo textiles.

The programme helped Brooke to put together a CV and application which helped him to secure a place at college studying fashion and textiles. Brooke has since incorporated an environmental perspective into his college work and has been collecting waste crisp packets for a dress he plans to make. Brooke would like to further his studies in fashion and costume design in future and hopes to continue to incorporate these environmental values in his future designs.

Self-employment (businesses created through the programme)

Of the 31 survey respondents who reported starting a business through their Our Bright Future project, 58% reported that the business was still operating¹². 29% (9 respondents) reported that the business was no longer operating and this was for a variety of reasons, the most common being that respondents and their business partners had gained full time employment and/or relocated.

Each business has a unique story best told through case studies. Two examples of businesses supported by projects which continue to operate are provided overleaf. This includes:

- Tom who participated in Uprising's Environmental Leadership Programme (ELP); and
- Emily who participated in the National Youth Agency's The Environment Now (TEN).

¹² A further 13% reported that the business was still operating though they were no longer involved.

Tom, Environmental Leadership Programme participant (Uprising)



Through the Environmental Leadership Programme, Tom jointly established E.Mission, a social action campaign which has since become a successful social enterprise providing a range of services to local authorities, schools and corporate organisations, specialising in engaging marginalised communities in climate action. The social enterprise established an app and has worked with restaurants to calculate and introduce carbon emissions labelling on menus, also creating an education programme to improve understanding of the carbon footprint associated with food.

ABOVE: Tom and his business partner presenting the E.Mission growth plan to funders

"I have the ELP to thank for most of my career, a lot of my closest friends and a lot of my happiness as a person." Tom

"I guess before I had a mentality of power isn't for people like me and I came out with a mentality of, I can build and be part of that future if I want. There is a place for people like me in these areas. Someone with my skillset and from my background and I actually have something to give as well." Tom

Tom reflects that the programme provided him with an understanding of power and influencing in the UK, how to engage and interact with power and *"the confidence to flourish"* and to strive for a career in something related. He thinks that a critical factor in these outcomes was the variety of speakers involved in the ELP, which optimised opportunities for different participants to relate to them and made Tom realise that *"people in power are just like me, they haven't come through a special route, they're the same and I could do that"*. He also thinks the length of the programme was important and describes how it becomes *"a component of your life for that year"*. Tom also notes that the combination of weekend and shorter sessions and opportunities to get *"hands on"*, allowed participants to get to know each other and *"get stuck in rather than just be a visitor"*.

Emily, The Environment Now participant (National Youth Agency)



With the support of the National Youth Agency's TEN project, Emily developed an app to offer virtual tours of forests around the UK and this led to her developing a variety of other virtual experiences e.g. a relaxing piece for care home residents. Emily decided to turn her project into a social enterprise and from there she founded *Virtually There Studio*. Two years on and she has since grown the business and now offers bespoke commissions, exhibitions, experiences and educational opportunities including creative and digital workshops on software and hardware. Emily has since also partnered with various computing clubs and a primary school and exhibited works around the UK, including at Tate Modern.

ABOVE: VR Headset and forest scene

"I was 22 at the time with no experience of running a company before, they took a chance, trusted and respected me, supported me and gave me the network to make it go from idea to reality or virtual reality in my case..."

[TEN] Gave me the confidence and support to make my social enterprise a reality and escape 9-5 office life to work for a cause and create positive change in my community... It has meant that I have built a social enterprise, got the confidence to work in outreach and education and to take my work seriously and pursue research at PhD level". Emily

Based in Suffolk, Emily didn't feel like there were many options available to her locally within the creative and immersive technology sector and recognised that TEN offered *"quite a unique opportunity, there's not lots of pots of money to help young people make these projects happen"*.

TEN supported Emily to connect and network with different people, access VR equipment and software for the first time and ultimately to transform her ideas into a creative social enterprise. Emily taught herself how to use immersive technology and was supported by TEN to access user groups for testing and develop necessary policies and procedures (e.g. safeguarding) for her business.

Emily really appreciated the opportunity to meet lots of different people through TEN and to hear about the experiences and journeys of others at different stages in their project and the success they were achieving. This gave her the self-confidence to believe her own project. She also notes that it was beneficial to be surrounded by encouraging people for whom *"no was never an answer"* in a *"safe space where there's no right or wrong answer"*.

These examples illustrate the variety of destinations of Our Bright Future participants. What appears common about their experiences were opportunities to meet and hear from others who are working and have succeeded in relevant careers and the self-confidence they gained through their projects which supported them in their progression.

Q2. To what extent, and in what ways, has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' subsequent engagement in volunteering and campaigning?

Summary:

- The majority of respondents indicated that they either had already, or were more likely to participate in volunteering or campaigning in the future, because of Our Bright Future. This corresponds with increased confidence and feelings of empowerment to lead or get involved in youth-led action and changed attitudes towards campaigning.
- While evidently an impact across all activity types, an increased sense of empowerment most widely resulted from campaigning and entrepreneurial project activities. It also appears to be sustained for more than 6 months after engagement.
- Some participants have continued to volunteer for the organisations leading Our Bright Future projects. This was as a result of both personal motivations (related to social benefits) and altruistic motivations to pay forward the benefits that they themselves had received from their experiences on projects.
- Participants have been influenced by Our Bright Future to volunteer outside of the programme not only for the benefit of the environment but also for community causes. As a result of the confidence they have gained, there are also examples of individuals engaging in social action in ways they would not previously have considered open to them.
- Some participants have already been influenced by Our Bright Future to get involved in campaigns and try to influence wider decisions, more often in their local area, for local organisations and schools, as opposed to at a national level.
- Our Bright Future has provided participants with inspiration and confidence to voice their opinion and continue to want to engage with environmental issues and campaigning.

Headline results

As shown in Figure 2.7, Our Bright Future projects have influenced some participants to engage in further social action outside of their projects including campaigning, influencing or volunteering of some form. Just under two thirds (64%) of respondents indicated that they had undertaken at least one of the actions shown. While still representing a majority of respondents, this suggests these impacts are perhaps less prevalent than career and employment related impacts previously discussed.

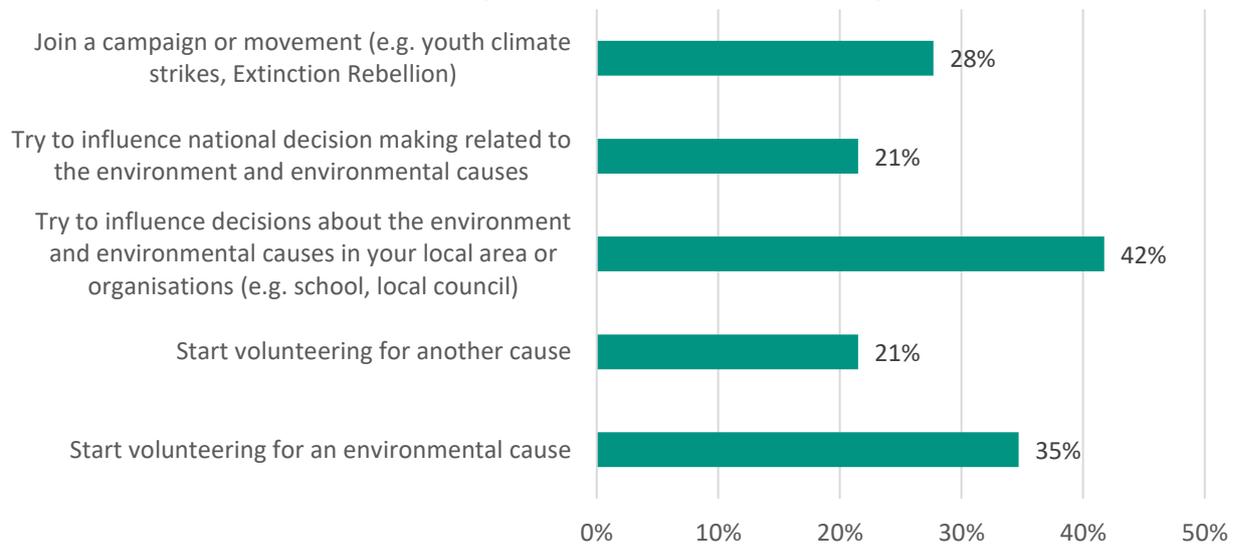
Respondents were subsequently asked, 'to what extent did your Our Bright Future project influence these choices?¹³', on a scale of 1-5 where 1= 'Not at all' and 5= 'A lot' (base:182). Our Bright Future clearly played an important role with 83% stating a '5' or a '4' and just 3% stating '2' or '1' (base: 182).

¹³ (for example, compared to other things which may have influenced you)

Figure 2.7 Influence on campaigning, influencing and volunteering

Has participation in your Our Bright Future project influenced you to do any of the following? (not including what you've done as part of the project)

Base: 242 (64% selected at least one action)

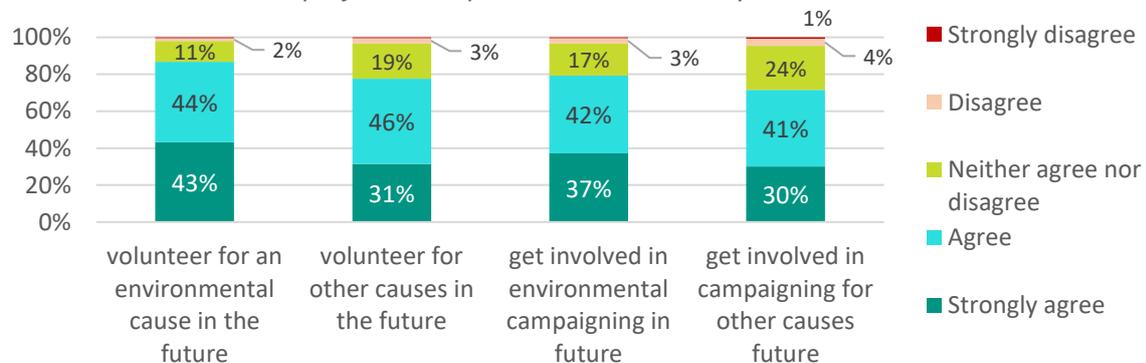


Similarly to employment related impacts, it is clear that longer term impacts are yet to be realised. Figure 2.8 shows that around three quarters of respondents expressed that they were more likely to participate in some form of volunteering or campaigning in future because of Our Bright Future.

Figure 2.8 Self-reported likelihood of volunteering or campaigning in future

To what extent do you agree with the following? Because of the Our Bright Future project I took part in, I am more likely to...

Base: 242



Corresponding with these actions, 74% of respondents indicated that Our Bright Future had increased their sense of empowerment '5' or '4' on a scale of 1-5 where 1= 'Not at all' and 5= 'A lot' (base: 251). As shown by Figure 2.9 overleaf, it is clear that this was an impact for some participants across all project activities. Overall similar levels of respondents also indicated that Our Bright Future had increased their confidence to get involved in environmental campaigns (79% indicated '5' or '4', base: 252).

Figure 2.9 Participants' sense of empowerment as a result of Our Bright Future

To what extent did your involvement in your Our Bright Future project provide you with increased sense of empowerment to lead environmental change or get involved in youth-led action/decisions (Base: 251)

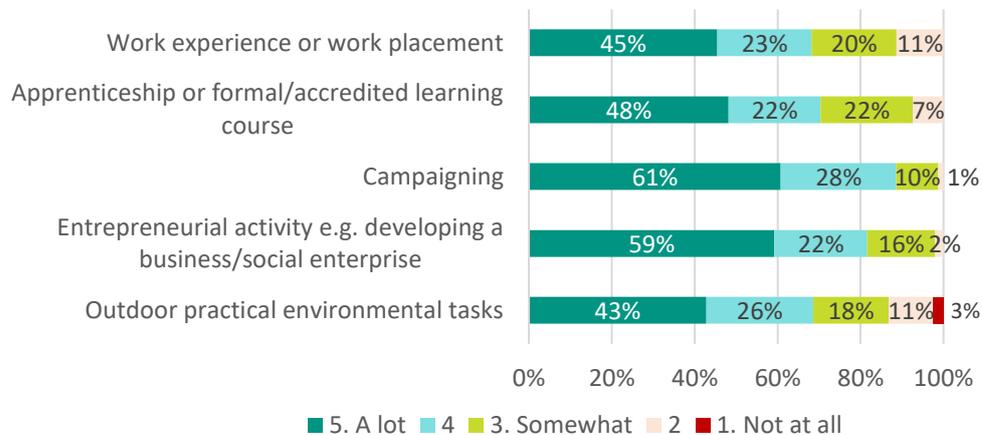


Figure 2.9 compares the results for those engaged in each project activity with those not. It appears that an increased sense of empowerment to lead environmental change was most widely reported by those who had engaged in campaigning or entrepreneurial activities through Our Bright Future.

Only a slightly lower proportion of respondents engaged more than six months ago reported this than those engaged within the last 6 months¹⁴. It is possible therefore that this impact is, more often than not, sustained for more than 6 months after engagement.

Volunteering

As shown by Figure 2.7, the data indicates that, overall, Our Bright Future had influenced 35% of respondents to start volunteering for an environmental cause and 21% to volunteer for another cause (base: 242). A greater proportion, more than three quarters, strongly agreed or agreed that because of their project, they were more likely to volunteer in future either for an environmental or other cause. This was fairly similar across project activities.

Many respondents referred to continuing to volunteer for their project or its lead organisation in some form or another after finishing their prior form of engagement (through Our Bright Future). The reasons for them continuing to want to volunteer included personal motivations: a growing interest in the environment and desire to continue learning, and the friendships participants had developed and wished to sustain with staff and other participants on their project. However, many also expressed altruistic motivations to pay forward the benefits that they themselves had received from their experiences on the project, to help new cohorts and others seeking to enter the environment sector and to support an organisation's cause and work. Participants continued to volunteer in various capacities, continuing with practical environmental activities in some cases and, in others, engaging with current participants to discuss their experiences and offer mentoring roles.

¹⁴ 76% of those engaged within the last 6 months selected '4' or '5' in response to the question on their sense of empowerment (shown in Figure 2.9) compared to 70% of those engaged more than 6 months ago.

Respondents also widely reported volunteering for other organisations since leaving Our Bright Future, including both environmental and socially based organisations. Some referred to volunteering with organisations they came across through their project.

“We went to this place and there were all these elderly people. It’s an art-based thing for the elderly people and we went to record a podcast. I enjoyed being there with the older people, sweet, down to earth and eager to help push me and I wanted to do the same again. I wanted to volunteer to make sure everything was alright with them.” Project participant

“Getting involved in Your Shore Beach Rangers has opened up a network down here in Cornwall for me. Because of the project and my apprenticeship on the Your Shore Beach Rangers team, I have now attended other environmental organisations’ meetings including Cornwall Seal Group Research Trusts and the Cornish Plastic Pollution Coalition and have volunteered my time with some of these organisations here in Cornwall.” Project participant

Many respondents expressed motivations to continue to help others and their local community as well as the environment. This also underpinned participants’ intentions to volunteer in future. Groups and organisations which respondents reported consequently volunteering for included: the Eden Project; local Wildlife Trusts; St John’s Ambulance, Girl Guiding and Scouts groups; and, various farms and different charities focussed on issues such as climate change, equal rights, individuals with learning disabilities, refugees, animal rights and food waste. Respondents also referred to participating in conservation activities include beach cleans and tree planting.

Younger respondents also referred to setting up, joining and sustaining environmental groups in their schools as a result of their participation in Our Bright Future projects.

“Currently still on high-school but the course helped me get the courage and inspiration to kick start a eco group in my high-school and take a more active role in my community.” Project participant

“Because of green future three years ago at my previous school I decided to set up an eco group and we had been awarded the green flag award.” Project participant

Several respondents also commented that their project had given them the confidence to take on volunteer roles on governance and management boards and other roles which some respondents had not previously considered open to them. This included roles on the Young Friends of the Earth England steering group, a local Wildlife Trust youth forum, a Friends of Park group, a school governing board and roles planning various environmental and community activity days.

“I now sit on 7 boards fro chritys [sic] such as groundwork and national lottery community fund.” Project participant

“It has influenced me to share my opinions on youth engagement with the environment and to do this I have volunteered on a number of boards to help steer the organisations.” Project participant

“I would now consider a more governance role rather than just a graft role. I’d certainly take that on, I’m involved in a number of organisations. I’m editor and chief for a small charity, I go to the board meeting and am a trustee”. Project participant

“The confidence it has given me also allowed me to get a volunteering placement using geolocation to map civil rights violations - without it, I don’t think I would have had the confidence to pursue an unadvertised opportunity like that.” Project participant

A small number of respondents also described how Our Bright Future had enhanced their subsequent experience of volunteering or had given them skills which had helped them in their roles. For example, one respondent specifically referred to using numerous skills they developed on their environmental

project (e.g. “social skills, leadership, motivating others, allocating funds, marketing”) in planning a climate awareness day in the park at which they volunteered. Meanwhile another respondent subsequently volunteering for a local Wildlife Trust said their experience was enhanced by having a greater appreciation for what the Trust does, why they were volunteering and consequently gained more from it because of participating in Our Bright Future previously.

Campaigning and influencing

Seven projects within the portfolio began with a target for young people feeling more engaged and empowered to lead change in their local communities. Corresponding with this target, more survey respondents indicated they had been influenced by the programme to influence local decisions than decisions on a national scale. Respondents described getting involved in campaigning within their schools, in their local area and also taking part in national campaigning as a result of Our Bright Future.



National – The survey results indicate that 28% of respondents were influenced by Our Bright Future to join a campaign movement or organisation. This included taking part in Extinction Rebellion, youth climate strikes and The Time is Now lobby. 21% of respondents also indicated that their project had influenced them to, in turn, seek to influence national decision making, and many subsequently described writing to their local MPs and signing petitions.



Local level – The survey results indicate that 42% felt their project had influenced them to try to influence decisions and causes in their local area. This is quite a large proportion given that only approximately a quarter of projects had a specific target related to this outcome. Respondents described getting involved in their local Green Party, Friends of the Earth local group, a council, youth forums, local action forums and planning meetings and lobbying local businesses to improve their environmental practices. One respondent also described setting up a refill scheme. Multiple respondents also described joining eco clubs, campaigning against waste and plastic use in their schools

It is clear from the results shown previously in Figure 2.8 that the majority of participants indicated a greater propensity to campaign in future as a result of their participation in Our Bright Future. Respondents described how projects had encouraged and inspired them to get involved in campaigning for the environment and social causes in various capacities. The subjects of respondents’ campaigns were largely focussed around environmental issues and included climate change, single use plastics, and wider waste issues. A small number of respondents also described taking inspiration from their projects to campaign for more specific causes and wider issues. For example, one respondent described “*fighting for the politics A-Level course I’ve been wanting to do but haven’t had chance to choose*”. Another had established a campaign around reusable menstrual products.

A small number of respondents specifically referenced using their own skillset within their approach to campaigning. For example, some described producing online content on issues to share, using film, photography, social media and online content to share messages. In some cases, respondents described securing influence and outcomes from their campaigns. Respondents further described securing the following outcomes from their campaigning efforts in their schools:

- creation of an environmental prefect role;
- establishment of several eco clubs and a charity committee;
- installation of recycling bins in every classroom;

- launch of a reusable cup discount scheme; and
- creation of a wildlife garden at a school.

Many participants also referred to supporting and engaging with Extinction Rebellion to varying degrees. The case study overleaf provides an example of how North Wales Wildlife Trust's Our Wild Coast influenced one participant, Bryony, to get involved in an Extinction Rebellion protest.

Bryony, Our Wild Coast participant (North Wales Wildlife Trust)

Bryony, aged 21 and living in North Wales, had just qualified as a yoga teacher and was between jobs when she took part in a 2-week course with Our Wild Coast. It was her first outdoor practical experience and she was eager to act on her passion for the environment, gain experience to include on her CV and start a career in the environment sector. Bryony was already passionate about the environment before the course but felt that it increased her drive and offered a unique opportunity to learn in the field and see theory come to life. She gained confidence to talk about the environment, help to educate others and self-confidence to speak publicly and engage in conversation with others.

"Confidence has always been an issue for me but now that I have found my voice, I am determined to use it... it [the course] made me feel like I knew everything, enough to be able to share with people and teach other people the knowledge." Bryony

She has put her confidence and skills into practice in her yoga teaching and shares her knowledge with tourists in her role as a National Park warden. Her experiences were also a key motivator for her joining and participating in an Extinction Rebellion campaign. Attending a protest, a person with a megaphone asked for a young person to speak and Bryony volunteered.

"I managed to make a speech in front of people. I definitely wouldn't have been able to do that without my time on the project, it gave me the boost I needed. I had the confidence to stand at the front line and shout down the megaphone words of encouragement for all the people of the streets to hear. I knew I had the power and the need to do this as my time with the Trust reminded me how urgent help is needed and how valuable young voices are to causes such as these." Bryony

It is possible that the greater propensity to campaign in future indicated by the survey results is linked to projects influencing participant attitudes towards campaigning. A couple of respondents specifically described how their projects had done just that. One interviewee had previously felt that there was a separation between protesting and environmental organisation. Through their project they had realised that it was acceptable to be involved in both, and that the scientific background of organisations such as the Wildlife Trust provided credibility to protests. Another interviewee had previously felt they could not campaign against issues which might conflict with their current and future employment. They credited their project with giving them "moral clarity" which "liberated" them to get involved in social action. In addition to these two examples,

Broadly, many projects had served to inspire participants to engage with issues and provided them with confidence to voice their opinions. However, it is clear from the evidence that some projects had a greater focus on providing participants with the specific knowledge, skills and confidence to approach campaigning. This was reflected in respondents articulating their increased awareness of the need for active citizenship, social action and tackling systemic challenges.

"Made me feel so much more confident and passionate about pursuing change. It's definitely set me up well as a lifelong activist!" Project participant

Q3. To what extent, and in what ways, has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' well-being and confidence?

Summary of findings:

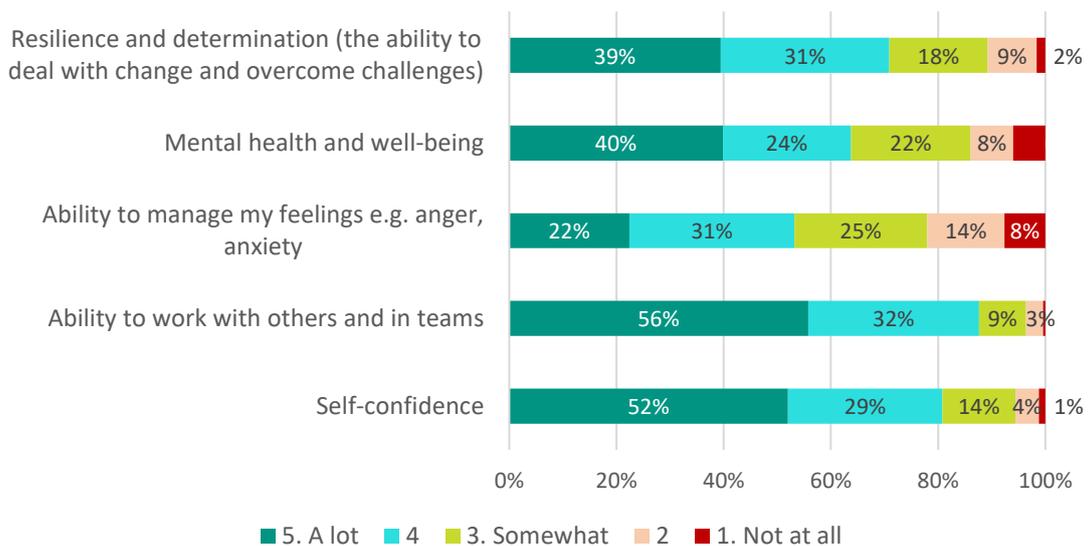
- Increased self-confidence is one of the most widely reported outcomes of Our Bright Future across quantitative and qualitative evidence with greater increases in self-confidence associated with long-term engagement to a greater extent than short-term engagement.
- Increased self-confidence is an outcome of all types of project activity, facilitated by a supportive environment provided by projects, social interaction; new experiences and challenges; the development of skills and achieving things beyond participants' expectations.
- Participants felt they would not have gained this confidence and other social and emotional competencies (such as resilience and their ability to manage their feelings) without Our Bright Future.
- Participants have also specifically gained confidence to engage with others socially, speak in public and apply specific skills. This has led to impacts for participants in the form of them securing further opportunities (e.g. jobs) and raising their ambitions.
- Participants have benefitted from well-being and mental health improvements as a result of Our Bright Future to varying degrees and for some with previously poor mental health, this has been an important impact.
- Improved well-being was most commonly reported by participants of both outdoor practical environmental tasks and apprenticeships or formal learning courses.
- While engagement in the outdoors has been one element of projects which has supported improvements in well-being, social engagement gaining confidence and helping others have clearly also played a role, particularly being for those who felt isolated or with poor mental health prior to their participation.
- Another factor which has contributed to improvements in well-being and mental health for participants is the confidence they have gained in their generation and ability to tackle environmental problems. Instead of the 'eco-anxiety' discussed in wider literature, learning more about environmental issues through Our Bright Future projects has served to address their fears to a degree and improve their optimism for the future.

Headline results

The majority of respondents self-reported that their involvement in Our Bright Future had improved a variety of factors relating to their personal and social skills and overall well-being, as shown in Figure 2.10 overleaf. The most widespread impacts reported were respondents' ability to work with others, their aspirations and hopes for the future, and their self-confidence.

Figure 2.10 Project impacts on well-being, confidence and social and emotional competencies

To what extent did your involvement in your Our Bright Future project provide you with increased/improved...? Base: 252



When asked ‘If you had not participated in your Our Bright Future project, do you think you would have gained these benefits in some other way?’, 39% said ‘no’ and 50% responded ‘don’t know’ (base: 242). Just 12% felt that they would have gained these benefits elsewhere and referred to volunteering with other organisations, education, and other local groups. However, many also referred to how, without Our Bright Future, they would not have experienced the same level of benefits or would have had to search elsewhere (and further afield) for another project. This is illustrated by the following examples.

“I would’ve gained them from a local beach cleaning group. But the group didn’t have a network as big as the project so it wouldn’t have been as beneficial”. Project participant

“Some of the benefits I would have gained through trial and error with my work on the organisation I co-founded in November 2019. However, I have learned much faster and gained the confidence to be much more adventurous through my Our Bright Future project which probably would not have happened otherwise”. Project participant

Confidence

As shown by Figure 2.10, over 80% of respondents reported that their involvement in Our Bright Future had increased their self-confidence (rating it either ‘5 a lot’ or 4). There is extensive qualitative evidence to support this and the quotes below represent just a small selection.

“They have helped me understand how much I can actually do that I thought I could not.” Project participant

“Slowly but surely building my confidence in myself as a young professional in this sector and more and more feeling like I had something worthy to say.” Project participant

“Confidence in myself and my ability. Knowing I can do it, you can learn along the way. That initial boost.” Project participant

“Has made tremendous impact on my confidence and my family are able to tell you that I seem like a different person as I am so much more open, inspired and confident.” Project participant

Taking '5' or '4' on the scale to mean a considerable increase in self-confidence, a slightly greater proportion of those who identified themselves as engaged in the long-term (88%) reported this outcome compared to short-term (70%). This suggests that longer-term engagement is associated with greater reporting of this impact than short-term engagement. There were no discernible differences in reporting of increased self-confidence by participants of different types of project activity however, a slightly greater proportion of those were still engaged in their project (88%) reported this outcome compared to those engaged in the last 6 months (80%) or those engaged more than 6 months ago (76%).

Examining other characteristics, a slightly greater proportion of females (83%) reported increased self-confidence as a result of Our Bright Future compared to males (77%). In terms of age groups, this outcome appeared slightly less common for those under the age of 16 (71% reported) and most common among those aged 19-21 (88% reported)¹⁵. Though it must be noted that this was the age of participants at the time of responding to the survey.

Over a third of respondents also referred to gaining confidence through projects in their qualitative responses to multiple different questions within the survey, indicating its relevance to a breadth of other outcomes. The level of confidence attained by participants naturally depended on their starting point on entering projects. In addition to increased *self*-confidence, gains in confidence were described in terms of the following:

	confidence to engage with others socially e.g. talking to others on their project and people in general and working as a team;
	confidence to speak in public including expressing opinions and talking about the environment;
	confidence to apply specific skills and knowledge e.g. campaigning, practical environmental tasks; and
	confidence to take up opportunities e.g. apply for jobs or university courses, work towards a particular career, start various projects e.g. an agroecological farm.

Participants described numerous factors and activities as supporting their growth in confidence, including, unsurprisingly, training and gaining experience in particular things. Respondents also confirmed suggestions made in the [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#) that specific experiences within projects contributed to their increased confidence, as shown overleaf.

¹⁵ 84% of those aged 16 to 18 and 79% of those aged 22-29 reported increased self-confidence as a result of Our Bright Future.

Experiences contributing to increased confidence



Social interaction: meeting and speaking with new and likeminded people as well as those in power, interacting in professional capacities supporting peers.



Developing skills and achieving things: particularly achieving things they previously did not think possible e.g. presenting in front of audiences.



New experiences and challenges: stepping outside of their comfort zone and being encouraged and supported to challenge themselves.

An additional factor identified by respondents was having a supportive environment in which participants felt encouraged by staff and free to realise what they were capable of without fear of judgement. This resonates with the findings of previous studies which indicated the support and motivation of project workers to be key to youth work developing resilience, social capital and self-esteem. The case study below illustrates how the Centre for Sustainable Energy's Bright Green Future project offered this type of supportive environment.

Isla, Bright Green Future participant (Centre for Sustainable Energy)

Isla was starting to think about her A-Level choices and higher education when she found out about Bright Green Future (Centre for Sustainable Energy). She had an interest in environmental issues but wasn't sure what she wanted to do. Bright Green Future supported Isla to find work experience with the charity 10:10 in London. The project also provided financial assistance and support to Isla and a friend with coordinating a local project, delivering a workshop to an arts charity for inner city children

Isla enjoyed making new friends at the project's residential and expanding her peer network of those interested in the environment. However, she thinks one of the most impactful benefits for her was the development of her confidence. Critical to this was the provision of a supervisor at Bright Green Future who would offer support with accessing funding and advice. She thinks her confidence also benefitted from participating in debates during the workshops and the enrichment of her knowledge which has allowed her to feel at ease talking around a wider range of topics. Isla additionally feels her work placement and local project gave her a unique insight into the working world and helped give her confidence to better interact with organisations in a professional context.

"It was really nice to have that one on one relationship. It was less intimidating for me to ask for things. I don't think I would've have approached someone as easily if I had to go to someone at the top of the organisation...Bright Green Future really helped me to build my confidence, especially with public speaking, being articulate and passionate, and spreading environmental messages."

Isla is also very thankful to Bright Green Future for introducing her to a variety of career paths and academic routes into environmental jobs and employment. Guest speakers and mentors for the project helped to demonstrate different paths which led to their various professions, reassured Isla that it was ok to be unsure about the future direction of her career and gave her the confidence to apply to study Geography at Oxford University.

"That was helpful in giving me confidence that if you follow a subject you love, you'll end up in a good place if you keep that passion."

As mentioned in previous sections, respondents described a range of impacts of the increased self-confidence they gained through projects. As identified in the [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#), this included increased confidence to:



raise their ambitions and strive for various education, employment and voluntary goals and positions;



take on new opportunities e.g. speak publicly, take on leadership positions and new responsibilities; and



overcome anxieties e.g. in relation to social situations and new experiences.

Examples of respondents' increased motivation to strive for careers, take advantage of education, employment and voluntary opportunities, raise and realise their ambitions are shown below.

"it has made me more confident and more comfortable to try new things and push myself. This will impact me because I am pushing myself to go for more opportunities than I would have done before the project" Project participant

"Definitely gained confidence in myself and the ability to get a job as before I did this I was too anxious to even apply for jobs." Project participant

"The project gave me the confidence in my own knowledge to apply for the warden role. Originally I had the case of 'imposter syndrome' where I didn't believe I knew enough about the biodiversity, conservation or nature in my local area to apply for a role like that. It gave me the kick I needed, the confidence, the understanding and the skills that were necessary."

Also confirming findings in the [Mid-Term Evaluation Report](#), some respondents linked their increased self-confidence with reduced anxiety in new situations and meeting new people. The quote which follows provides an example of this link.

"When I went to my first youth forum with Green Futures, I cried because I felt so nervous about meeting new people. Now my confidence has grown. I did a speech to 200 delegates in Bristol with the Bright Green Future project, and didn't cry, and this confidence is here to stay." Project participant

Maddie, a participant of YorkShire Wildlife Trust's Tomorrow's Natural Leaders project also provides an example of how projects have supported participants to gain confidence while also supporting their mental health.

[Maddie, Tomorrow's Natural Leaders participant \(Yorkshire Wildlife Trust\)](#)

While Maddie gained a variety of environment based, transferable skills through Tomorrow's Natural Leaders (TNL), the most important outcome of the project for her was the development of her confidence. Maddie feels that an important part of developing her confidence was the variety of new experiences she gained through the project, including speaking with senior managers of large organisations.

Through a placement with TNL Maddie got involved in practical environmental management, surveying, youth outreach and a group community project. At the time, Maddie had completed her first year at university but had realised she didn't want to continue with that course so had taken a break to take care of her mental health and explore her future options.

RIGHT: Maddie taking part in bird ringing with TNL.



She recalls representing the project and volunteering at Countryfile Live and being praised by the fundraising manager. This really helped to boost Maddie's confidence. Maddie's group project also involved lots of interaction and communication with teachers, staff, pupils and suppliers, an experience which Maddie feels greatly boosted her soft skills and confidence in professional situations. Maddie also appreciated the support provided by staff. When she was unable to participate for a few weeks, she was grateful that the staff kept in touch to check in on her and send her activities to keep her busy at home. She describes this as really important for her mental health.

"They kept in touch with her [Maddie] a lot rather than just abandoning her. She seemed happy with the people she was working with and in a happy environment. She'd come in filthy wet but with a smile on her face. It was a positive experience for her I think." Maddie's Dad

Though Maddie was already volunteering with the Wildlife Trust before she began the project, TNL has reinforced the positive experiences offered through volunteering and the benefits it has for her mental health. She now can't imagine not volunteering and is looking for future opportunities near to where she is studying. She credits the project with helping her to get to know people, including life-long friends, making links with other organisations and giving her the confidence to move back to University.

Well-being and mental health

Overall, seven projects originally set targets for improving young people's health and well-being and participants of four of these responded to the survey. As shown by the headline results in Figure 2.10, 64% of survey respondents indicated that Our Bright Future had increased their mental health and well-being (rating '5 A lot' or '4'). Similarly, to confidence, it is clear that this outcome was very much dependent on participants' state of well-being prior to joining Our Bright Future. It is clear from comments that certain respondents who were previously experiencing poor mental health, that their projects significantly contributed towards improvements for them.

Taking a '5' or a '4' on the scale to represent noteworthy improvements in mental health and well-being, this outcome was slightly more widely reported by those engaged in the long-term (65%) than the short term (56%). In addition, respondents aged 19 to 21 at the time of responding to the survey most widely reported this outcome (71%) and those aged 22-29 least widely reported this outcome

(60%)¹⁶. There was minimal difference between responses for male and female respondents (66% and 63% respectively reported this outcome).

Importantly, a greater proportion of those still engaged with their project (88%) reported improved mental health and well-being than those who last engaged in the previous 6 months (80%) or more than 6 months ago (76%). This could suggest that this outcome is short-lived for some however longitudinal research with the same participants would be required to confirm this.

In some, but not all cases, qualitative comments on mental health and well-being improvements related to being outside, as suggested in the literature reviewed. There were also further examples of respondents recognising the benefits of the outdoors for others they were working with on projects, including other participants and groups of people they were volunteering to support (e.g. the elderly).

“The reason I was brought on to the milestone project 4-5 years ago was that I was suffering from anxiety and being out away from school in a different environment definetley [sic] helped.” Project participant

“The opportunity to spend more time outdoors and to give more time doing something I enjoy has also greatly improved my mental health.” Project participant

“Wildlife helps me with stress and anxiety” Project participant

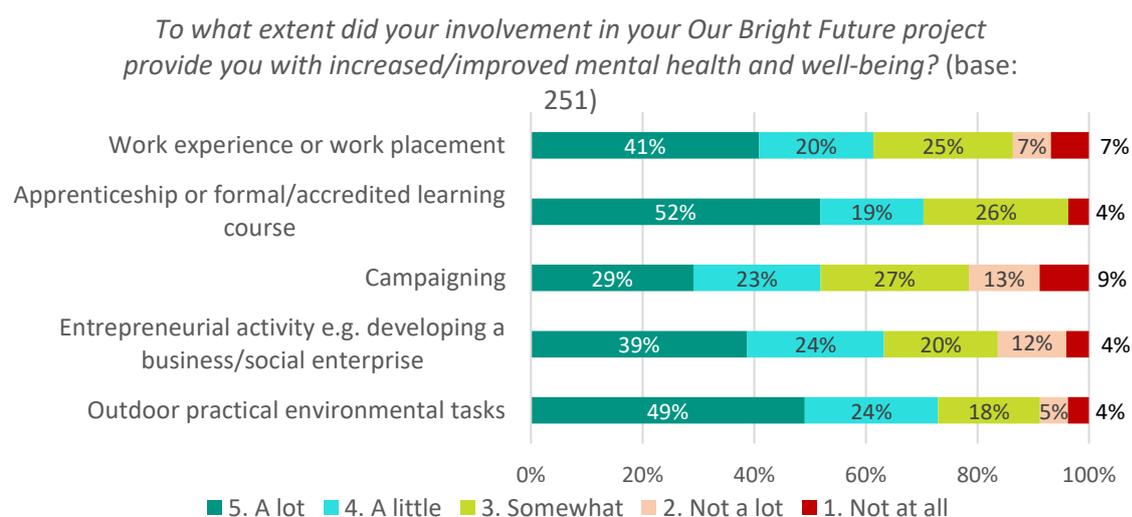
“Getting out in the fresh air away from uni life has massively reduced stress levels” Project participant

“MyPlace gave me a space to improve my mental wellbeing, by engaging in something meaningful and enjoying outdoor spaces. Through my time with MyPlace, I found my confidence increased, my anxiety decreased and I looked forward to each session” Project participant

“Made me appreciate the countryside more which is great for helping to deal with mental health and using it as a space to just breath [sic].” Project participant

In order to further examine the extent to which outdoor engagement may have played a role, a comparison can be made between survey respondents who reported engaging in different activity types. The results are shown in Figure 2.11.

Figure 2.11 Mental health and well-being improvements comparison by activity type



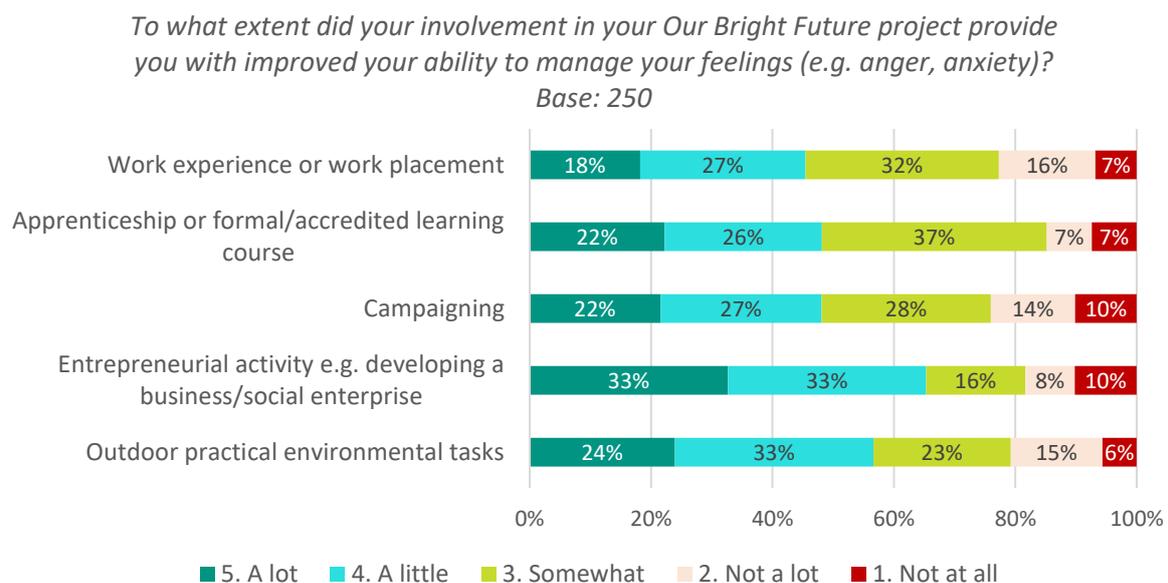
¹⁶ 67% of respondents under the age of 16 and 66% of those aged 16 to 18 reported increased well-being ('4' or '5' on scale).

It appears that a slightly greater proportion of those engaging in outdoor tasks reported improvements in mental health and well-being compared to those undertaking campaigning, work experience and entrepreneurial activities. However, the difference is marginal. Participants of apprenticeships or formal/accredited learning courses also reported comparable levels of improvements to well-being as a result of Our Bright Future. Several projects coordinating this type of activity are based around outdoor activities and therefore it is possible that this has played a role in leading to this impact.

However, other aspects of projects, notably social engagement, were clearly also important factors in supporting improvements in mental health for *some* participants. This can be assumed both from individual respondent comments and the fact that some participants on projects which were not based outside, also reported mental health and well-being benefits from their project. Respondents extensively commented on making friends through their project which continued beyond their participation. Some also linked this with feeling “*more connected*”, part of a community and having a “*support network*”.

Relating to this management of anxiety, Figure 2.12 presents the programme’s impact on participants’ ability to manage their emotions, drawing comparison between project activities. It appears entrepreneurial project activities have supported a greater proportion of participants to improve their ability to manage their feelings than other project activities.

Figure 2.12 Impact of Our Bright Future on participants’ ability to manage their feelings



Qualitative analysis reveals that those who commented on mental health benefits frequently referred to particularly poor mental health prior to participating. This included individuals who reported being unemployed or felt isolated and lacking social contacts previously. Those commenting that they previously lacked social contact referred to improvements in mental health as a result of gaining confidence, helping others, overcoming social anxiety and meeting new people through projects.

“Friendly and open people as well as a slow and patient teaching method. So I guess this program overall just helped really calm my nerves and taught me to just try whatever and see how it works out!” Project participant

“Green futures has given me the information and skill set to be able to help others and also better myself, I have become more confident, less anxious within groups and teams and have become so much more resilient knowing that I can do things I never thought I would of even had the opportunity to do.” Project participant

Several respondents also described how their mental health was improved by learning more about how to tackle environmental problems and meeting others equally passionate about the environment. In these cases, improved mental health resulted from confidence that environmental issues could be tackled and meeting others who were also passionate about supporting the environment. Several respondents also commented that they had not been in a situation where they had met such likeminded people before.

“Being with other like-minded individuals has given me increased hope for the future of the planet” Project participant

“it will definitely help me for mental health and feeling more relaxed with the world, knowing that it can be fixed and can be helped” Project participant

“helped my mental health by showing me I wasn't the only person who wanted to make positive change” Project participant

Respondents' comments indicate that their involvement in projects supported them to feel optimism for the future and greater confidence in their generation. While there was no evidence of the 'eco-anxiety' discussed in wider literature, the evidence instead points to participants gaining greater optimism and hope for the future as a result of learning more about environmental issues through their projects and knowing others share the same pro-environmental attitudes as them.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This study offers an indication of how Our Bright Future has impacted on participants and what has contributed towards these impacts. This serves to provide evidence of attribution and verify links between participation in projects and key anticipated impacts including secured employment, future intentions to participate in social action and improved well-being and mental health.

1. To what extent and in what ways has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' career decisions and their progression in education, training, employment or self-employment?

- There is extensive evidence to indicate that Our Bright Future projects have already played an important role in influencing the majority of respondents' career decisions, in some way. There is extensive evidence to demonstrate participants feel taking part in Our Bright Future has increased their employability and confidence. Alongside these outcomes, participants have raised their ambitions to strive for various educational and employment opportunities both within and outside of the environment sector as a result of their participation.
- There are various examples to demonstrate that Our Bright Future has played an important role in supporting some participants to *secure* employment and education related opportunities, including self-employment (leading businesses they developed on the programme). There is some evidence to suggest participants engaged in apprenticeship, campaigning and entrepreneurial activities and those over the age of 18 were most likely to be impacted by the programme in this regard.
- There are indications that many participants' plans and ultimate goals relating to employment are largely yet to be realised. Therefore, it is perhaps too soon to collect evidence of the full extent of long terms impacts of the programme and the employment destinations of participants.

2. To what extent, and in what ways, has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' subsequent engagement in volunteering and campaigning?

- Evidence gathered indicates that Our Bright Future projects have influenced just under two thirds of alumni respondents to pursue campaigning, influencing or volunteering of some form after participating. Participating in Our Bright Future encourages some participants to continue volunteering both for personal motivations (related to social benefits) and altruistic motivations fostered to help others, communities and a broad range of other environmental and social value-based causes.
- The programme has also evidently served to provide alumni with inspiration and confidence to voice their opinion and continue to want to engage with environmental issues and campaigning. The evidence suggests the programme influences participants to try to influence local decisions more than those on a national level.

- The combined effect of the programme influencing alumni attitudes and providing them with increased self-confidence has led to participants engaging with social actions in ways they would not previously have considered.
- There are indications that the long-term impacts are yet to be realised as the majority of participants indicate that Our Bright Future has made them more likely to volunteer or campaign in future. It is beyond the scope of the available evidence to indicate whether these increased intentions to participate in volunteering and campaigning translate into action and how long after participation individuals continue to feel empowered and motivated to do so.

3. To what extent, and in what ways, has Our Bright Future contributed to project participants' well-being and confidence?

- The evidence suggests that increased self-confidence is one of the most common outcomes of Our Bright Future. Larger increases in self-confidence are associated with long-term engagement to a greater extent than short-term engagement and more recent engagement than those who last engaged more than 6 months ago.
- Increased self-confidence is evidently an outcome for participants of all *types* of project activity. What appears key to this outcome is a supportive environment provided by projects; social interaction; new experiences and challenges; and the development of skills and achieving things beyond their expectations.
- An extensive range and breadth of evidence indicates that increased confidence is also an outcome of Our Bright Future which has underpinned various other impacts for participants. This includes progression into education, training, volunteering and employment, as well as linked with improvements to mental health and well-being.
- Our Bright Future has clearly substantially improved some participants' mental health and well-being, underpinned by several factors including engagement in the outdoors, social engagement, gaining confidence and helping others.
- Improvements are associated to a slightly greater extent with long-term engagement over short-term engagement and is most pronounced in participants more recently engaged with their project than those engaged more than 6 months ago.
- There is some qualitative evidence to indicate that projects have given some participants greater confidence in their generation and ability to tackle environmental problems which has also contributed to improvements in their well-being and mental health. Instead of the 'eco-anxiety' discussed in wider literature, learning more about environmental issues through Our Bright Future projects has served to address their fears and improve their optimism for the future. This would benefit from further research to fully explore the dynamics of this relationship.

Closing comments

While offering valuable, evidence across multiple projects, it is important to remember that the study was never intended to be representative of the full programme. Besides the scale of the task, and multiple different factors at play (e.g. project type, respondent characteristics), participant and alumni contact details across the programme's portfolio of projects are incomplete and unobtainable.

Importantly, it should also be recognised that engaging the most vulnerable and disadvantaged participants is challenging and difficult to secure without targeted one to one engagement, beyond the scope of this study. Impacts for more vulnerable and disadvantaged participants therefore represents a key evidence gap within this study.

Being able to contact previous participants from all projects and securing a higher response rate from this group would have enhanced the ability to record longer-term impacts across alumni. It is therefore advisable for future programmes of a similar nature and length to encourage projects to maintain a database of alumni contact details to allow for follow-up for the purpose of evaluation. In line with GDPR, it is important that organisations are clear from the outset with participants, when collecting personal contact details, on the purpose of this and duration that these will be held.

A larger sample size would also give greater confidence in the results, particularly when comparing groups of participants by key variables such as project type, length and time since engagement. A further variable of interest which was beyond the scope of this study is participants' motivations or entry route into projects. While some young people's participation in Our Bright Future can be considered similar to wider volunteering discussed in the literature, in other cases, participants are specifically referred (e.g. by social services, DWP, jobcentres and schools). This represents a further variable which might have influenced the impacts individuals experienced.

Due to the variety of activities delivered by Our Bright Future projects, different types of engagement (voluntary/directed), different age groups and starting point of participants (in terms of confidence, well-being, interest in the environment), each individual participant experience is very different. While there is no common pathway through Our Bright Future, there are numerous common outcomes and impacts, as demonstrated by this study. The study offers valuable evidence to demonstrate how, and in what ways, project activities have led to key outcomes and impacts for participants. Whilst it is essential to note the limitations listed, the research summarised within this report indicates the value and impacts that can be achieved for young people via programmes such as Our Bright Future.

Based on the evidence collected, enhancing self-confidence should be considered a central aim of any intervention since this was found to underpin further positive impacts for young people including progression into education, training, volunteering and employment, as well as improvements to mental health and well-being. Improved self-confidence evidently provides the foundation for personal growth. As such, key components for incorporation in future interventions include a supportive environment, social interaction, new experiences and challenges, the development of skills and achievements. Long-term engagement also appears to be more beneficial for self-confidence and well-being benefits than short-term engagement.

These findings are particularly pertinent considering the recent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current generation of young people, their education, mental health and employment prospects. Activities such as those provided by Our Bright Future appear to offer a potentially valuable investment opportunity to tackle multiple agendas and challenges relating to young people.

APPENDIX A: STUDY METHODOLOGY

This section of the appendices presents the methodology for the study, covering the research questions; literature review; primary data collection; approach to analysis; and limitations of the method and timing of the research.

Literature review

As there are few comparable programmes to Our Bright Future, the literature review for this study explored topics around the anticipated impacts of key aspects of the programme's delivery. This included the impacts of volunteering, social action, and engagement in nature. This informed the approach and lines of enquiry for primary research undertaken with participants of Our Bright Future. Key questions the review sought to consider included:

- What are the impacts of engagement in volunteering and environmental projects on employability?
- What are the impacts of volunteering and engagement with the environment on well-being and mental health?

A similar review was conducted for the Baseline and Context Report for Our Bright Future in 2016. Therefore, the scope of this literature search was specifically to identify literature published since 2016. The literature review drew on a combination of academic and 'grey' literature, including programme evaluations, systematic evidence reviews, and policy documents.

Primary data collection

Online survey of participants

An online survey was used to gather self-reported evidence of impacts for young people from a sample of participants (n=258) across the portfolio. The objective was to provide evidence of impacts across a sample of participants, to demonstrate how Our Bright Future has supported certain pathways into education and employment and to better understand how this has taken place for participants of different characteristics and projects with different activities.

The survey was developed by the programme evaluation team, informed by both existing evidence of impacts and evidence gaps. Most questions were 'closed' (e.g. multiple choice, rating scale) to minimise the time required of respondents to complete the survey and to gain an overview of impacts. This was supported by opportunities to provide explanations where participants chose to do so. At the end of the survey, respondents were also asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview to discuss their responses in greater detail. Those willing were requested to enter their e-mail contact details for follow-up.

The survey was developed with input from the Evaluation Panel and piloted with seven members of the programme's Youth Forum in order to ensure it was accessible and straight forward to complete.

The survey was distributed by the programme team to project managers who were asked to distribute it via e-mail to participants and ex-participants. A Microsoft Word version was also provided to allow for an alternative method of completion. The survey was launched on 22nd April 2020. Distribution coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19 and meant some project staff were furloughed while other projects temporarily ceased delivery. As a result, the survey remained open until October 2020, to maximise the opportunity for all projects to support distribution.

In order to encourage responses from a breadth of participants and a high overall response rate, an incentive was offered to participants for completing the survey. This included entry into a prize draw, with multiple opportunities to win online vouchers for a range of online retailers (with pro-

environmental values). The importance of the research in the context of ongoing support and funding for projects was also emphasised.

In total the survey received 299 responses from participants of 25 projects. After data cleansing¹⁷, this resulted in a sample of 258, although individual questions have slightly different response rates (base numbers are reported against results throughout this report). This represents 0.07% of the total short- and long-term engaged participants recorded by the programme up to the end of 2019¹⁸. A profile of survey respondent socio-demographics and breakdown by project is provided in [Appendix B](#).

Telephone interviews with participants

Telephone interviews were undertaken with a sample of survey respondents who consented to be contacted¹⁹. In total, 13 interviews were conducted, including one with the parent of a participant. Ten further respondents were contacted on three occasions but no response was received.

These provided further depth and understanding to the survey results. They were also used to gather personal accounts of pathways into education, employment, volunteering and improved mental health. These were then used to produce a set of case studies which are appended to this report.

To some extent those interviewed were determined by the young people who indicated they were willing to be contacted. However, interviewees were also sampled to include a variety of projects (by activity focus), as well as participants of different ages and levels of engagement. The sample was also informed by respondents' qualitative responses with a view to discussing specific areas of impact corresponding with the research questions. In addition to entry into a prize draw for all survey respondents, interviewees were offered a voucher as an incentive to take part in an interview.

Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis was undertaken in Microsoft Excel to calculate totals and draw comparisons based on respondent characteristics and their engagement with the programme. Comparisons between participants of different activity types was complicated because participants were able to select that they took part in more than one type of activity²⁰. Comparisons are still valid but it is important to note there is some overlap between the separate sub-samples.

All qualitative data from the survey and the transcripts from interviews with participants were collated and inputted into NVivo Qualitative Analysis software. NVivo allows for the effective organisation and analysis of the multiple sources of data collected for the evaluation. An initial coding structure was developed by the researchers to reflect the anticipated lines of enquiry corresponding with each research question. This was developed iteratively during the coding process to account for emerging findings. In order to undertake analysis, NVivo reports were produced for specific combinations of codes corresponding with research questions.

Quotes from participants' responses are used throughout this report as examples of findings. These are referred to as "*project participant*" though this includes both previous and current participants.

Case studies of participants were developed separately based on the interviews and their survey responses. Case study write-ups were sent to participants to check for accuracy and consent to use of

¹⁷ Responses removed included those which were incomplete, duplicates and from respondents over the age of 29 (since projects are only open to participants up to the age of 25 and the programme began in 2016).

¹⁸ 35,633 recorded as short-term or long-term engaged up to the end of 2019. Just two survey respondents reported one-off engagement.

¹⁹ 155 provided an e-mail address and consented to be contacted however not all proved to be accurate/ contactable.

²⁰ It was necessary to allow participants to indicate more than one type of activity as some projects have multiple different strands of activity. Nevertheless, there remain some clear areas of focus worth differentiating.

their name and write-up in this report. Of the 12 interviews undertaken with participants, the ten were selected to be written up as case studies based on the accounts which yielded the greatest depth of information. However, consent was only able to be obtained from nine (one could not be contacted). These nine are appended to this report. Extracts are also used throughout the report. These were chosen to provide key examples of impacts and participant experiences.

Data issues and limitations

Limitations of the data collection process and its timing are detailed below.

- **Timing of the study shortly after the outbreak of COVID-19:** The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 and subsequent enforced social distancing was reported to have prevented some participants from taking up opportunities or led them to postpone their plans for spring and summer 2020. This most notably affected participants' plans for education, employment and volunteering. With the survey launched in April 2020, it is possible that impacts reported by participants were limited by the pandemic. This was expressed directly by several participants in their survey responses.
- **Distribution of the survey by some, but not all, project managers:** As the programme evaluators and programme team did not have access to the contact details for participants, it was necessary to rely on project managers for distribution of the survey to their participants and previous participants. In part due to furloughing of staff, not all projects distributed the survey and consequently no participant responses were received for 6 projects. This means that the full portfolio of projects was not able to be represented.
- **Some projects lacked contact details for previous participants:** The initial intention of the research was to examine long-term impacts on participants who had since left their project. However, the reach of the survey was limited by the number of projects which had maintained contact databases and consent from project alumni to contact them once they had left the project. When asked, just 11 project managers reported that they had distributed the survey to ex-participants in addition to current participants. The sample is therefore to some extent biased towards current participants with 39% of respondents reporting that they were still an active participant. This limits the potential for long term impacts resulting from projects to be observed.
- **Survey and interview samples were self-selecting:** Inevitably, the survey response derived from those willing to participate. While incentives were offered to encourage breadth of participation, it remains possible that the sample is based on the most engaged participants and those most keen to support their project. As an indication of this, just 1% of respondents reported engaging with the programme on a one-off basis²¹. The responses received represent a small sample of the total Our Bright Future programme participants and alumni, equivalent to less than 1% of short-term engaged and 2% of long-term engaged participants. Rather than statistically representative, the evidence provides examples and an indication of the prevalence of impacts amongst this sample.

²¹ The Mid-Term report indicated that 70% of participants in the first two and a half years of the project engaged on a one-off basis.

APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Survey sample profile

Gender	%
Female	69.8%
Male	27.9%
Non-binary	1.6%
Prefer not to say	0.8%
Base	258

Age	%
Under 16	9.5%
16 to 18	22.1%
19 to 21	23.7%
22 to 29	44.7%
Base	253

Last engaged in project	%
I am still an active participant	38.8%
I finished/last participated within the last 6 months	18.2%
I finished/last participated 6 months to 1 year ago	16.3%
I finished/was last engaged more than one year ago	26.7%
Base	258

Engagement (single response)	%
One-off (participated once, up to one day in total)	0.8%
Short-term (participated more than once over the course of up to three months)	15.1%
Long-term (participated for a period of three months or more)	81.0%
Other (please specify)	3.1%
Base	258

Project type (multiple choice)	%
Outdoor practical environmental tasks	65.5%
Entrepreneurial activity e.g. developing a business/social enterprise	20.2%
Apprenticeship or formal/accredited learning course	11.1%
Campaigning	31.7%
Work experience or work placement	17.9%
Base	252

Employment (multiple choice)	%		%
Full-time employment	23.5%	Full-time volunteering	2.7%
Part-time employment	16.1%	Part-time volunteering	17.6%
Full-time education/training or apprenticeship	47.8%	Unemployed	3.9%
Part-time education/training or apprenticeship	4.3%	Self-employed	1.2%
		Base	255

Interviewee sample by project and lead organisation

- Our Wild Coast – North Wales Wildlife Trust x 2
- YMCA- Fruit-full Communities - Learning Through Landscapes x 1
- Environmental Leadership Programme – Uprising x 2
- BEE YOU! - Blackburne House x 1
- Bright Green Future – Centre for Sustainable Energy x 1
- Green Futures – Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust x 1
- Tomorrow's Natural Leaders – Yorkshire Wildlife Trust x 1
- Creative Pathways Environmental Design - Impact Arts x 1
- Natural Estates / Our Bright Future - Avon and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (Youth Forum) x 1
- The Environment Now – National Youth Agency x 1

APPENDIX C: LITERATURE AND EVIDENCE REVIEW

This review considers some of the long-term impacts of engagement in youth and environmental activities similar to those funded by Our Bright Future. Evidence is therefore drawn from both academic research (e.g. in fields such as psychology and social work), grey literature (e.g. evaluations of similar interventions), and the websites of organisations delivering similar programmes.

The review is structured according to key outcomes which Our Bright Future is seeking to foster, namely employability benefits and well-being and mental health improvements. Due to the variety of projects and activities they deliver, the scope of interventions considered for this review was purposefully broad, encompassing social action, volunteering and engagement in community and environmental work/projects.

Impacts of engagement in volunteering and environmental projects on employability

As recognised in the programme's Baseline and Context Report, volunteering is often associated with skills development and increased employability, particularly for young people and as a step into first time employment. The majority of young people see volunteering as valuable for their career progression, and employers value the skills young people gain through such experiences²². Research from the National Youth Agency (2008) found that, in addition to developing practical experience and skills, volunteering also supported young people to test out different career opportunities²³. This may represent an additional related benefit for participants of Our Bright Future.

However, some analysis of direct outcomes has found that these benefits for young people may be overstated. Recent reviews of literature and evidence on youth volunteering outcomes have concluded that while volunteering broadly contributes to employability and enhanced job prospects, evidence of the direct link between the two is limited^{24,25}. One summarised that while volunteering can have a significant observable impact on skill development and career readiness, the case is less clear for attainment and progression²⁶.

Quantification of a link between volunteering and employability is limited although one study in the US of a sample of over 70,000 unemployed individuals (aged over 16), found volunteering was associated with 27% higher odds of employment, with a particularly strong link for those without a high school diploma and living in rural areas²⁷. It is notable that this study took place over two years and that there is generally a lack of longitudinal studies and studies incorporating control groups which more rigorously test this link.

Other studies challenging the link between volunteering and employability have also emphasised that the link between volunteering and likelihood of individuals moving into employment, importantly depends on who you are, why you are out of work, and on how much volunteering you do. For example, one study concluded that volunteering only assists the move into employment for older people and those with family caring responsibilities²⁸.

Many of the same themes and limitations apply to studies of environmental volunteering in particular; there is little direct evidence of employability outcomes, despite suggestions of a multifaceted link. In recent years, a number of environmental volunteering programmes aimed at young people have

²² vInspired (2008)

²³ Ockenden and Stuart (2014)

²⁴ Ockenden and Stuart (2014)

²⁵ Dartington Service Design Lab on behalf of the Centre for Youth Impact (2019)

²⁶ Williams (2017)

²⁷ Spera et al. (2013)

²⁸ Paine, McKay and Moro (2013)

recorded qualitative and/or anecdotal evidence of positive impacts on employability as described below.

- Access to Nature, an environmental grants scheme run by Natural England and funded by the Big Lottery Fund, assessed 7 of its funded projects that worked directly with NEET young people aged 13-24. Qualitative interviews with project leaders and beneficiaries indicated that participants gained higher aspirations, wider understanding of the opportunities and routes to employment available to them, and improved employment prospects²⁹.
- The John Muir Trust runs a place-based environmental award scheme in Scotland. In interviews, participants cited gaining employability skills including leadership, teamwork, and confidence. Delivery partners also noted that employers often recognised the John Muir Award and the calibre of those who have achieved it, leading to job offers³⁰.
- Action for Conservation's WildED project supports young people from deprived urban areas in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 to design and lead their own environmental project³¹. Following the programme, 84% of participants reported becoming aware of what a career in conservation looks like, and 77% were more interested in a conservation career³².
- The Children's University offers pupils in primary schools across England the opportunity to take part in outdoor learning activities, after-school clubs and community social action. A 2-year study of year 5 pupils taking part in the programme found several outcomes resulted from out of-school enrichment activities³³. School leaders and parents interviewed recognised that the activities supported young people to build character and develop aspirations for the future. Pupils in the study reinforced this by commenting that the activities inspired them to consider further study and careers. Comparison of treatment and control groups also found a small average improvement in pupils' reading and maths performance however this was not found to be true for poorer pupils. A smaller improvement in teamwork and social responsibility was also observed and this was conversely found to be more pronounced for disadvantaged pupils (eligible for free school meals).

In addition, there is evidence that direct participation in environmental research is an important factor in encouraging students from minority backgrounds to consider ecology as a career path³⁴. Senior ecologists have argued that widening participation in ecology research can best be achieved by pre-college ecology research, located in urban green spaces familiar to participants, with the crucial component of near-peer and relational mentoring to foster long-term enthusiasm for the field³⁵. Volunteering may act as a conduit for this preparatory research and training; indeed, there is some evidence that volunteering's positive effect on employability is enhanced for those from ethnic minority backgrounds³⁶.

²⁹ Natural England (2013)

³⁰ John Muir Trust (2013)

³¹ Action for Conservation (accessed 2019)

³² Vanson, T., *et.al* (2019)

³³ Siddiqui, Gorard, and Huat See (2019)

³⁴ Armstrong et al. (2007)

³⁵ Aloisio et al. (2018)

³⁶ Hirst (2001)

Impacts of volunteering and engagement with the environment on well-being and mental health

Volunteering

As referenced in the Baseline and Context Report for Our Bright Future, it is widely purported that volunteering improves well-being and mental health. Past research has shown volunteering's positive impacts on mental health are associated with improved self-esteem, a sense of purpose, self-efficacy, connection and social interaction. A recent study also found the stress-buffering effect of volunteering contributed to improved emotional well-being for participants who volunteered on a daily basis³⁷. However, another recent study reviewing literature in this area recognised that a large proportion of research in this area has focussed on older volunteers and that in general, the benefits of volunteering on psychological well-being increase with age³⁸.

A 2018 review of evidence on the well-being outcomes of out-of-school community-based programmes for young people highlighted several common outcomes across multiple studies which included self-confidence, self-efficacy and emotional regulation³⁹. The same study concluded however that there is a lack of evaluation taking place across the youth sector.

One of the few recent studies of young people engaging in volunteering focussed on individuals leaving care and found that volunteering opportunities supported this vulnerable group in transitioning out of care and into adulthood⁴⁰. Specifically, engaging in these activities supported young people to develop resilience and social capital. The authors suggest that helping others and the sense of achievement provided by social action supported the young people to develop their self-esteem. Key elements of the work with young people were reported to be the personalised nature of opportunities offered and the support and motivation of project workers. Notably, this represents an example of 'supported volunteering' where participants are likely to have been signposted for their own benefit, as opposed to volunteering for altruistic motivations.

Engagement with the environment

There is good evidence for the health benefits of interaction with the natural environment, including mental-health and well-being. Multiple studies have shown that engagement with the environment in youth, particularly conservation volunteering, has a positive impact on mental health^{41,42}. A recent review of the literature suggests that exposure to nature has observable neuroscientific effects relating to improved mental health, including biological stress recovery and reduced lateral prefrontal activation (the area of the brain associated with rumination)⁴³.

However, these positive effects are typically recorded during or immediately after engagement, and evidence on long-term impacts is scarce. A number of recent longitudinal studies have suggested that exposure to nature reduces levels of depression in the long-term^{44,45}. These studies are nearly all concerned with the effects of sustained proximity to the natural world over time, rather than the effects of a specific and clearly delineated encounter with nature⁴⁶.

³⁷ Han et al. (2019)

³⁸ Kim and Morgül (2017)

³⁹ Allock, A. (2018)

⁴⁰ Webb, L. *et al* (2016)

⁴¹ O'Brien, Townsend and Ebdon (2010)

⁴² Currie, Lackova and Dinnie (2016)

⁴³ Van den Bosch and Meyer-Lindenberg (2019)

⁴⁴ Alcock et al. (2014)

⁴⁵ Annerstedt et al. (2012)

⁴⁶ Van den Bosch and Meyer-Lindenberg (2019)

Nevertheless, frequent engagement with natural spaces in youth has been shown to create a sustained preference for similar engagement throughout adult life. Particularly for urban children, experiences with wild environments tend to create a long-term preference for activities in natural spaces⁴⁷. It has been hypothesised that children realise and internalise the benefits of contact with nature in childhood, creating an unconscious and lasting preference⁴⁸. It is therefore possible that engaging with nature at a young age, and positively benefitting from the experience, leads to long-term benefits as a result of the individual continuing to seek exposure to nature and the outdoors.

Anxiety linked to awareness of environmental issues and threats

Awareness of climate change is thought to have a significant impact on social and emotional wellbeing. As a result, 'eco-anxiety' is a term now frequently used to describe extreme worry about current and future harm to the environment caused by human activity and climate change. Psychologists and social scientists have drawn increasing attention to this as a potential area for concern and have called for more research. Confusion about the exact facts and magnitude of climate change may exacerbate these feelings of anxiety⁴⁹.

There is little direct evidence concerning current rates of 'eco-anxiety' among young people; the term has been popularised outside of academic spheres, and the phenomenon is mostly attested to through anecdotal evidence from parents, teachers, psychologists and young people themselves^{50,51,52}. There are fears that eco-anxiety is particularly prevalent in young people, as they face growing up in an uncertain future outside of their control.

Whilst there are few studies on the topic, there are two published reports from Australia. The first is a 2007 survey of 600 Australian children between 10 and 14 years old, commissioned by the Australia Childhood Foundation. The study found that 44% were worried about the future impact of climate change, 43% were worried about air and water pollution, and 25% were anxious about the world to the extent that they believed it would come to an end before they got older⁵³. A more recent survey of over 1500 young people aged between 14 and 23 years old found that 80% of young people felt somewhat or very anxious about climate change – 46% on a weekly basis – and that over a fifth were planning not to have children of their own in response to their concerns⁵⁴.

Concluding statements

This review directly informed the development of research tools for this study. There is some evidence to suggest particular experiences such as volunteering and engagement in youth environmental programmes have employability and confidence impacts for participants. However, the case is less clear for how similar interventions might impact upon well-being and relationships with social action. Our Bright Future is a unique programme in that it combines a varied portfolio of project activities targeted at very different demographics of young people. Therefore, it is difficult to compare the programme's collective impact directly with any previous interventions.

⁴⁷ Bixler et al. (2002)

⁴⁸ Ward Thompson, Aspinall and Montarzino (2008)

⁴⁹ Fritze et al. (2008)

⁵⁰ Clayton et al. (2017)

⁵¹ Nugent (2019)

⁵² Hickman (2019)

⁵³ Tucci, Mitchell and Goddard (2007)

⁵⁴ ReachOut (2019)

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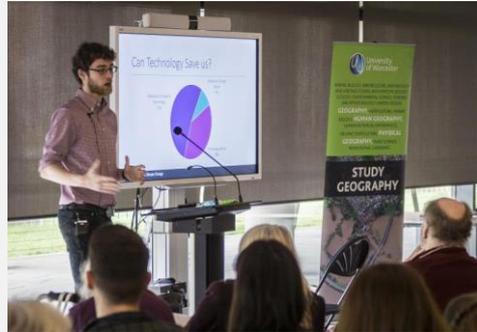
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APPENDIX E: CASE STUDIES

Tom, Environmental Leadership Programme participant (Uprising)

Tom had recently graduated and was working as a component engineer for a manufacturing company when he became aware of the Environmental Leadership Programme (ELP) coordinated by Uprising. He had an interest in the environment but limited knowledge about how to apply it. Two years later he is still passionate about the ELP and using the knowledge and skills he gained in his job, his business and his voluntary work.



"I have the ELP to thank for most of my career, a lot of my closest friends and a lot of my happiness as a person."

Through the programme, Tom worked as part of a group of other participants to coordinate a social action campaign called E.Mission. The campaign brought together their different interests to tackle climate change with a focus on reducing the impact of individuals' diet. The campaign resulted in the production of an app which aims to help people understand the carbon emissions associated with their diet. Within the first month of launching, the app was accessed approximately 4,000 times.

After completing the programme, Tom and the five other members of his campaign group setup E.Mission as an environmental social enterprise. The app continues to exist however the company has broadened its focus and now provides a range of services to local authorities, schools and corporate organisations, specialising in engaging marginalised communities in climate action. Together they have worked with restaurants to calculate and introduce carbon emissions labelling on menus and have created an education programme to improve understanding of the carbon footprint associated with food.

Uprising continued to provide informal support to Tom and his partners after they left the programme and put them in touch with funders, Climate KIC, which provided key investment in the business. Tom continues to stay in touch with connections he made at Uprising. He also volunteers with them, returning to run a workshop on the UN Sustainable Development Goals with subsequent cohorts and describing this as a highlight of his year.

Tom reflects that the programme provided him with an understanding of power and influencing in the UK, how to engage and interact with power and "the confidence to flourish" and to strive for a career in something related. He thinks that a critical factor in these outcomes was the variety of speakers involved in the ELP, which optimised opportunities for different participants to relate them and made Tom realise that "*people in power are just like me, they haven't come through a special route, they're the same and I could do that*". He also thinks the length of the programme was important and describes how it becomes "*a component of your life for that year*". Tom also notes that the combination of weekend and shorter sessions and opportunities to get "hands on", allowed participants to get to know each other and "*get stuck in rather than just be a visitor*".

"I guess before I had a mentality of power isn't for people like me and I came out with a mentality of, I can build and be part of that future if I want. There is a place for people like me in these areas. Someone with my skillset and from my background and I actually have something to give as well."

The programme also provided Tom with practical skills but he feels that the biggest benefit was learning how to achieve power and influencing and lead from the bottom.

"Something I think Uprising teaches you incredibly well is leading from the bottom. It's something I've been able to do effectively at work through driving through change."

Tom feels that he applies the confidence and knowledge he gained from the programme consistently “all the time, every day”. Before the ELP, Tom had been working as a component engineer. He credits the programme with educating him about environmental careers and demonstrating that he could have a career which combined engineering and his interest in the environment. He subsequently applied for and was successful in gaining a role as a sustainability systems engineer in the same company, working on CO₂ reduction, circularity and supply chain projects. Tom recognises that, while his degree was important in equipping him with the relevant skills, the ELP was critical in motivating and empowering him to push for his new role within the company and one of the reasons he is able to do it so well. Using the knowledge and leadership skills he gained at the ELP, Tom has recently led on a companywide strategy that is set to save many millions of tonnes CO₂. He has also taken on new roles representing early careers staff in the business and, as a STEM Ambassador, has directed the company towards targeting marginalised communities more through their CSR work promoting STEM subjects to school pupils.

“The ELP was as formative for me as going to uni. One of the most formative experiences of my lifetime....without the ELP I’d definitely be a lot less happy. That’s probably the most important thing. I’d probably still be in a job that I didn’t really enjoy. I’d probably be a much more boring person. I’d be less engaged with power and less involved in campaigning and social action and a less involved member of my community.”

Tom also credits the ELP with providing him with an awareness of personal branding, “diplomacy” and an understanding of how to engage different audiences from senior management or councillors to children and deprived communities. He has found this informs his approach to communication across his different roles, as a director of E.Mission and in his job. He also feels it has helped him to become a more effective campaigner. Tom was involved in voluntary work prior to the ELP but the programme led him to realise that he could offer a different set of skills and prompted him to consider roles involved in governance. As well as Director of his own company, he is now joint editor in chief and trustee for a small education charity and involved in Fossil Free Coventry, a group lobbying Coventry City Council to divest from fossil fuels. Through various campaign groups, Tom is also working with councillors (some of whom he met through the ELP), MPs, unions and communities with the Coventry for a New Green Deal group. Through the ELP he gained an understanding of power dynamics and the barriers faced by some communities and subsequently specialises in working with communities disenfranchised from climate action as well as with large institutions.

Maddie, Tomorrow's Natural Leaders participant (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust)

Maddie was volunteering for the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust when she heard about the placement offered through Tomorrow's Natural Leaders (TNL). She'd heard about the experiences from other participants and was eager to try it out. At the time, Maddie had completed her first year at university but had realised she didn't want to continue with that course so had taken a break to take care of her mental health and explore her future options.



TNL allowed Maddie to expand her volunteer experience with the Wildlife Trust, work as a team and take on leadership roles. Her experience combined practical environment management and surveying with youth outreach and the design and delivery of a group project.

Maddie's group project involved designing and constructing a wildlife garden at a local school. This involved lots of interaction and communication with teachers, staff, pupils and suppliers, an experience which Maddie feels greatly boosted her professional and soft skills. She thinks that one of the best things about the project was its flexibility which allowed her to guide and pursue her own interests. She also valued the trust placed in participants and felt that was an important part of the project.

"I had the opportunity to lead a team of 6 other young people. I was the person who said, you could do this, you could do this, working with other people's skills and specific interests. I wasn't ever like this before but I was the most direct person." Maddie

While Maddie gained a variety of environment based, transferable and soft skills through TNL, the most important outcome of the project for her was the development of her confidence. She feels that an important part of this was the variety of new experiences on the project, including speaking with senior managers of large organisations. She recalls representing the project and volunteering at Countryfile Live and being praised by the fundraising manager. This really helped to boost Maddie's confidence.

Maddie also appreciated the support provided by staff. When she was unable to participate for a few weeks, she was grateful that the staff kept in touch to check in on her and send her activities to keep her busy at home. She describes this as really important for her mental health.

"They kept in touch with her [Maddie] a lot rather than just abandoning her. She seemed happy with the people she was working with and in a happy environment. She'd come in filthy wet but with a smile on her face. It was a positive experience for her I think." Maddie's Dad." Maddie's Dad

Maddie was previously studying for a degree in animal management but was looking to change after her first year. TNL helped Maddie to realise where her interests and strengths lie. The skills she gained through TNL (e.g. undertaking wildlife surveys) compensated for the first-year ecology modules she lacked and meant that she could transfer to Zoology and enter straight into the second year (without restarting her degree). TNL also led Maddie to realise that she enjoys working with children and project management, more so than the practical work she was involved in. Influenced by the project, she therefore hopes to get involved in environmental outreach work in the future.

Maddie was successful in applying for a seasonal assistant ecologist position earlier this year. The interview process was highly competitive and she credits the skills and attitude she gained through TNL as supporting her in gaining the position over older applicants who had already graduated. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, it was not possible for the position to go ahead but Maddie hopes that she may be able to take it up next year.

Through TNL, Maddie was encouraged to write to her MP about the new Environment Bill. She's also felt more motivated to write letters for other causes and now frequently shares things she has read online with her social networks. Though Maddie was already volunteering with the Wildlife Trust before she began the project, TNL has reinforced the positive experiences offered through volunteering and the benefits it has for her mental health. She now can't imagine not volunteering and is looking for future opportunities near to where she is studying.

Thinking about what would've happened had she not participated in TNL, Maddie comments she "*might've got there eventually*" along a different volunteering path with the Wildlife Trust. However, she feels she wouldn't have gained her job with Go Ape and thinks this would've been very detrimental to her. She also credits the project, not just volunteering at the Trust, with helping her to get to know people, including life-long friends, make links with other organisations and giving her the confidence to move back to University.

Isla, Bright Green Future participant (Centre for Sustainable Energy)

Isla was starting to think about her A-Level choices and higher education when she found out about Bright Green Future. She had an interest in environmental issues but wasn't sure what she wanted to do. Bright Green Future focussed on young people and offered an opportunity to connect with others of Isla's age. She also liked that the project was supportive of individuals following their own interests and choosing their own path.

Bright Green Future offers webinars, workshops and residential focussed around the environment, energy and climate change. The project also supports participants to take part in a work placement and project local to them. While a lot of the project is delivered remotely, cohorts meet at intervals, including the summer residential. Online webinars are delivered by CSE as well as guest mentor speakers.

Bright Green Future supported Isla to find work experience with the charity 10:10 in London. She worked in different departments and gained an insight into a variety of roles including marketing, funding and how organisations operate. The project also provided financial assistance and support to Isla and a friend with coordinating a local project, delivering a workshop to an arts charity for inner city children. The project also supported Isla to attend an exhibition in London on sustainable fashion.

Engaging in the project broadened Isla's perspective of environmental issues. She felt that, in school, she wasn't able to learn about the subject in depth, particularly how communities across the world are being affected and also how they're tackling environmental issues. The project helped her to better understand different perspectives and gain an appreciation of how to effectively communicate and make issues more accessible to different individuals and communities.

"They taught me how to understand the issue on a deeper level, by encouraging me to see how important engaging and connecting with nature is; in politics, in our lifestyles, in everything! It pretty much changed my mindset on how I approached environmental issues when campaigning in school and in my community."

Isla enjoyed making new friends at the residential and expanding her peer network of those interested in the environment. However, she thinks one of the most impactful benefits for her was the development of her confidence. Critical to this was the provision of a supervisor at Bright Green Future who would offer support with accessing funding and advice. She thinks her confidence also benefitted from participating in debates during the workshops and the enrichment of her knowledge which has allowed her to feel at ease talking around a wider range of topics. Isla additionally feels her work placement and local project gave her a unique insight into the working world and helped her to better interact with organisations in a professional context.

"It was really nice to have that one on one relationship. It was less intimidating for me to ask for things. I don't think I would've have approached someone as easily if I had to go to someone at the top of the organisation...Bright Green Future really helped me to build my confidence, especially with public speaking, being articulate and passionate, and spreading environmental messages."

Visiting community-based projects with Bright Green Future also encouraged Isla to think locally, about individual actions she can take and the importance of investing in local communities. This, combined with realising the enjoyment she gained from being outdoors, led Isla to volunteer with a local park and in local conservation work. As part of her role with a local park, she carried out a climate awareness day, putting the skills she gained through the project into action to coordinate and deliver the event.

"I think my mindset before was that the biggest change you could do would be go out and get involved in big global companies but Bright Green Future encouraged you to think a lot more locally. It encouraged me to look at what's local and an enterprise really embedded in the community and made me think of the park. It encouraged my thought process."

Isla is also very thankful to Bright Green Future for introducing her to a variety of career paths and academic routes into environmental jobs and employment. Guest speakers and mentors for the project helped to demonstrate different paths which led to their various professions, reassured Isla that it was ok to be unsure about the future direction of her career and gave her the confidence to apply to study Geography at Oxford University. She discussed her experiences with the project in her interview at Oxford and feels that it definitely contributed to her academic choices.

“That was helpful in giving me confidence that if you follow a subject you love, you’ll end up in a good place if you keep that passion.”

Although Isla remains unsure exactly what she wants to do after graduating, the options presented have prompted her to consider town planning and working in government departments. It’s also motivated her to get involved in her local community and she hopes to continue to do so in the future. She also hopes to take on board the project’s values of enlisting future younger generations in thinking about the environment and has already begun by telling young family members to get involved in local environmental issues and communities.

Gethin, Our Wild Coast participant (North Wales Wildlife Trust)

Gethin had just finished his first year in environmental conservation when he heard about the Our Wild Coast traineeship. He had been interested in the environment from a young age, influenced by his family and working on an organic farm. His interest in biology and wildlife therefore led to his degree choice. However, Gethin was struggling to find opportunities to secure practical experience in the field and hoped that the traineeship would offer an insight into working for the Wildlife Trust as well as boosting his employability. He was already volunteering for the Trust and had enjoyed his experience so was seeking to develop skills which might be useful for a career with the organisation.

Gethin really enjoyed the hands-on aspect of the traineeship and felt that he learnt a lot through constant dialogue with the Wildlife Trust officers, particularly identifying skills. He also recognises that an important factor was their enthusiasm, willingness to go “above and beyond” and the “overall energy of the group”. He feels that the traineeship really complemented the theoretical knowledge gained in his academic studies through offering practical skills and insights into marine environments. Through the traineeship, Gethin was able to gain a number of AQA qualifications and was particularly grateful to gain an RAC certificate in Emergency First Aid at Work for Outdoor Practitioners. He notes this is ordinarily quite expensive and will benefit him in future jobs in the outdoor sector.

“I learnt a lot from my university course over my first year, however, my 2 weeks with the WT was invaluable in teaching me what my academic studies could not; a first-hand understanding of conservation practice. The traineeship was an immersive and hands-on experience, which was complimented perfectly by the theoretical knowledge provided by the professionals who were constantly around us.”

Gethin also really enjoyed learning outside and felt this encouraged him and other participants to ask questions and continue conversations about the environment in their break. Gaining an appreciation for everything the Wildlife Trust does, Gethin left with the feeling that it is a friendly and supportive organisation. He also gained an appreciation for their role in campaigning, influencing Gethin to want to “get involved and make a difference”. He has since got involved in a number of protests, engaging with the local environment campaign group in Bangor and attending an extinction rebellion protest in London.

Gethin feels that the most important outcome he took away from the experience was confidence in himself and the application of the skills he’d learnt at university. Gethin has since used the skills and confidence he gained through the traineeship both in his university studies and volunteer role with the Wildlife Trust. He has since returned to some of the same sites for his university fieldwork and feels it really helped to have a prior understanding of the area.

With no other prior experience of conservation, Gethin feels Our Wild Coast was important in giving him the confidence to apply for a work placement as an assistant ecologist. Gethin also feels it ultimately helped him secure the placement as he feels the traineeship satisfied a lot of the desired criteria for the role (e.g. ID skills and working in outdoor environments) and helped him to demonstrate his passion at the interview. He believes that without the traineeship, he would’ve found it more difficult to secure a placement for his university year in industry and that he wouldn’t necessarily have followed a practical ecology route, perhaps instead pursuing something theoretical relate to sustainability.

“Our Bright Future has been an invaluable experience for me, giving me many qualifications as well as applied experience, which massively helped secure my future placement... the placement will give me even further insight. It’s the domino effect. The initial experience is really hard to get. It’s led to my placement, which should help get me in the door.” Gethin

Overall, the traineeship has allowed Gethin to gain a balance of experience in the conservation sector and an insight into working for the Wildlife Trust. He is now better aware of his interests and feels it will definitely help him once he’s finished his degree and seeks to pursue a career in something related.

Bryony, Our Wild Coast participant (North Wales Wildlife Trust)

Bryony, aged 21 and living in North Wales, had just qualified as a yoga teacher and was between jobs when she took part in a 2-week course with Our Wild Coast. It was her first outdoor practical experience and she was eager to act on her passion for the environment, gain experience to include on her CV and start a career in the environment sector. The course included coastal and land conservation, covering both practical conservation and written study around conservation funding, charities and the North Wales Wildlife Trust. Bryony was not aware of anything of similar depth and interest available elsewhere in North Wales.

Bryony enjoyed learning about species, habitats and particularly marine conservation on the course as she already felt knowledgeable about inland conservation and wildlife. She also enjoyed discussing the environment and conservation with others on the course. *“It was incredible to be around people as equally passionate as me.”*

Bryony was already passionate about the environment before the course but felt that it increased her drive and offered a unique opportunity to learn in the field and see theory come to life. She gained confidence to talk about the environment and help to educate others as well as personal self-confidence to speak in front of, and engage in conversation with others. The knowledge, confidence and drive she gained on the course also helped Bryony to apply for and secure a voluntary role as warden for Snowdon National Park.

“Confidence has always been an issue for me but now that I have found my voice, I am determined to use it... it [the course] made me feel like I knew everything, enough to be able to share with people and teach other people the knowledge.”

Bryony attributes the success of the course and the skills she gained in part to studying in an outdoor classroom which allowed her to observe the interconnectedness of things first hand, prompted her to ask questions and gave her “headspace” and inspiration. She also valued learning in a small group every day for two weeks and believes this further helped her through the ongoing conversations shared during breaks and the collective source of inspiration the group offered.

“it quite literally gave you the questions to ask- you wanted to know more about what was there before your eyes, rather than written down on paper or off a computer screen.”

She has put her confidence and skills into practice in her yoga teaching and shares her knowledge with tourists in her role as a warden as well as others whenever she has the opportunity. Her experiences also prompted her to volunteer to make a speech at an Extinction Rebellion protest.

“I had the confidence to stand at the front line and shout down the megaphone words of encouragement for all the people of the streets to hear. I knew I had the power and the need to do this as my time with the Trust reminded me how urgent help is needed and how valuable young voices are to causes such as these.”

Bryony is keen to learn more and further her skills, potentially progressing with Snowdonia National Park as she'd like to continue to work towards its protection.

Brooke, Creative Pathways Environmental Design participant (Impact Arts)



Brooklyn, 17, had left school and was waiting to apply to further education when he found out about the programmes delivered by Impact Arts and funded by Our Bright Future. He felt under pressure to start work but was anxious and didn't feel ready. Creative Pathways therefore offered a good opportunity to gain new experiences and enhance his CV.

"Before, I was doing nothing and under pressure to get a job. But I felt that I wasn't ready to get a job yet, it stressed me out and gave me anxiety. Without the Creative Pathways, I just feel I would've been in the same routine and doing nothing with my time until college came up and applying for college is hard so I don't know if I would've been accepted or I wouldn't have known what to do."

The Creative Pathways Environmental Design course is an arts-focused employability programme teaching young people aged 16-19 practical, creative arts skills and encouraging them to think about green issues, while offering them support with job-searching, CV-building and interview skills. Brooke got involved in each of the three stands of the project, progressing to become a Youth Ambassador for the programme. While participating, Brooke got involved in design for a comic book and short film, leading on costume production. He also featured in the film and took part in some modelling for another participant's portfolio. He recalled his mum observing how the project had increased his positivity towards his creative side and led to a growth in his artistic and creative endeavours.

During his time on the project, Brooke gained self-confidence and confidence meeting and talking to new people. He attributes this to the supportive environment created by the project, the encouragement of staff, and the support from other participants. He appreciated the opportunities provided to offer feedback amongst the group, work with others and be paired with other young people with similar and complementary interests so that they were able to offer mutual support. For example, Brooke was able to help another participant interested in photography with their portfolio while simultaneously benefitting from the opportunity to gain experience modelling. In the end, it was getting to know the staff and other participants that Brooke enjoyed the most and he remains friends with many of the other young people today.

"The first week I was too scared to talk to anybody and it was so awkward because it was quiet and I was shy. Once I settled in and the tutors pushed us to talk to people, I started to gain confidence and make new friends."

One of the project's trips involved visiting a group of elderly people in the local community. He enjoyed meeting and talking with the older people, recalling how they were eager to help push him and help him however they could. He would like to return to there to volunteer and help them in exchange but unfortunately was prevented from doing so earlier this year by the outbreak of COVID-19. He hopes he may be able to take up this opportunity in future.

Brooke was particularly interested in learning about the environment and how he could incorporate eco-friendly design, upcycling, recycling and reuse into his fashion designs. He learnt about using waste materials as well as sustainable materials such as bamboo textiles. The programme also helped him to put together a CV and application which helped him to secure a place at college studying fashion and textiles. Incorporating an environmental perspective into his college work, Brooke has been collecting waste crisp packets for a dress he plans to make. Brooke would like to further his studies in fashion and costume design in future and hopes to continue to incorporate these environmental values in his future designs.

Emily, The Environment Now participant (National Youth Agency)



Emily was a student studying for a Masters in printmaking when she came across the O2 Think Big grants which offer young people £300 to support them to launch projects which use technology to help communities. Emily used the funding to undertake a project using virtual reality to make museums' collections more accessible to the public. After winning an award for the project, she was told about The Environment Now (TEN) and applied with a view to using similar technology to demonstrate the positive social and environmental impacts it can have while highlighting the impact of climate change, waste and deforestation.

Emily was attracted by the opportunity to learn more about creative technologies and move towards more digital creativity. Based in Suffolk, Emily didn't feel like there were many options available to her locally within the creative and immersive technology sector and recognised that TEN offered "quite a unique opportunity, there's not lots of pots of money to help young people make these projects happen". Emily was aware of environmental issues and engaged with the environment through a heritage lens, studying landscape paintings previously, but it wasn't until TEN that she became more engaged in environment.

TEN supported Emily to connect and network with different people, access VR equipment and software for the first time and ultimately to transform her ideas into a creative social enterprise. Emily taught herself how to use immersive technology and was supported by TEN to access user groups for testing and develop necessary policies and procedures (e.g. safeguarding) for her business. Her project started with the development of an app to offer virtual tours of various forests around the UK and led to her developing a variety of virtual experiences e.g. a relaxing piece for care home residents and other pieces to more actively engage audiences/users.

Emily really appreciated the opportunity to meet lots of different people through TEN and to hear about the experiences and journeys of others at different stages in their project and the success they were achieving. This gave her the self-confidence to believe her own project. She also notes that it was beneficial to be surrounded by encouraging people for whom "no was never an answer" in a "safe space where there's no right or wrong answer".

"I was 22 at the time with no experience of running a company before, they took a chance, trusted and respected me, supported me and gave me the network to make it go from idea to reality or virtual reality in my case." Emily

Emily recalls how, prior to the project, she struggled with anxiety and was nervous to make a phonecall or take a train on her own. Gaining soft skills through TEN, she describes the project as "transformative" in supporting and enabling her to become who she is today including teaching to a room full of people on a regular basis.

Emily found TEN valuable in directing her to a variety of helpful individuals and ideas. From this, she began to appreciate the opportunities offered by partnering with others for mutual benefits. After coming to the end of her engagement with TEN, she decided to turn her project into a social enterprise. From there Emily gained a space at a local creative co-working space and founded [Virtually There Studio](#). Two years on and she has since grown the business and now offers bespoke commissions, exhibitions, experiences and educational opportunities including creative and digital workshops on software and hardware. She hopes that she can show that there are alternative creative pathways into a technology-led career, outside of university. Emily has since partnered with various computing clubs and a primary school and exhibited works around the UK, including at Tate Modern.

Emily was also successful in her application to teach Digital Media part-time at Anglia Ruskin University. She feels that her entrepreneurial skillset was something that helped her gain her role at the university. Within her teaching Emily has also embedded the learning on the environment into various taught elements, for example tracking pollution levels in playgrounds.

Emily is also working part-time on a PhD with StoryLab. Her research is focussed on investigating site-specific storytelling work with immersive technologies and examining the effectiveness of analogue and virtual approaches to creating meaningful experiences with the environment. She hopes to use her data to demonstrate the power of virtual reality technologies.

Emily wanted to go into teaching prior to joining TEN but she imagines that without the project, she would have probably sought a teaching role in a secondary school and been confined by a strict curriculum. She is glad that she has greater freedom teaching at the university where there is greater opportunity for innovation and experimentation and acceptance of failure. Over the last couple of years Emily has also undertaken a work placement with Suffolk County Council and received various other grants but she credits TEN with providing her with the initial confidence to establish her own business.

"I would've tried to muddle my way through that way but never have the confidence to setup myself now. I would've got quite a dull job that I wasn't happy in... [TEN] Gave me the confidence and support to make my social enterprise a reality and escape 9-5 office life to work for a cause and create positive change in my community... It has meant that I have built a social enterprise, got the confidence to work in outreach and education and to take my work seriously and pursue research at PhD level". Emily



VR headset and scene

Ella, Avon Wildlife Trust (project Youth Forum)

Ella is a self-employed illustrator, young creative and activist. She began volunteering with the Avon Wildlife Trust's (AWT) Youth Forum in March 2020. This has meant that all of her interaction with the project to date has been remote and undertaken online. Ella was invited to informally lead the AWT's youth forum while a key staff member was furloughed.

With the guidance of other staff, Ella led a group of young people to produce content for the AWT's social media once a week. One of her favourite experiences from her involvement was a take-over of [AWT's Instagram](#) account that she proposed and delivered on the subject of environmental racism and the need for wildlife conservation to be more inclusive. As part of this, Ella produced more than 20 slides of illustrated content, an example of which is shown opposite (others feature in AWT's Instagram Climate Justice story highlights).



Ella is currently working on creating action packs for a collaborative event being coordinated by the AWT and the Bristol Natural History Consortium. The webinar event, [Communicate+](#), is seeking to engage young people in discussions around nature conservation and what they can do in their communities to influence policy and behaviours. Ella is also due to be speaking at the event. Through her engagement with the project Ella was also able to attend training in insect identification.

Ella thinks that the project was particularly beneficial as it was authentically youth led with young people given ownership and valued for their current contributions, as opposed to their future potential. She thinks it is important to recognise however that not every young person can afford to volunteer and, unfortunately, as a result, the diversity of volunteers is limited.

Ella was already an activist, creating content around wildlife and environmental racism however the opportunity to participate in the youth forum helped her to develop connections and gain experience developing content around connections with nature. She notes that she would have been engaged in issues around nature without the project but recognises that AWT has given her greater access to information and the motivation to create content. As a result, she believes she has gained knowledge on wildlife and enhanced her research, leadership and online communication skills.

Having not studied at higher education, Ella also feels that she has gained important experience and knowledge volunteering with the Wildlife Trust that may prove useful, should she seek further study or work in the environment sector. The opportunity has opened her eyes to the work available in environmentalism and given her the confidence to pursue it.

"It established me as a creative who is passionate about wildlife conservation. It's propelled me and given me more credibility" Ella

As an example of how the experience has already helped her, Ella notes that she recently reached the third stage of an interview for an internship position which attracted over 400 applications. She strongly believes that her work with AWT played a significant role in being able to reach that stage. Ella has made connections within the Wildlife Trusts through the project and hopes to further these in future and become better engaged within the team, be that in person or online. She would also ultimately love the opportunity to gain employment with the Wildlife Trusts in future.

Rachel, BEE You participant (Blackburne House)

Rachel was involved in the BEE You project, where she had the opportunity to learn skills in beekeeping. Prior to becoming involved in BEE You, Rachel was working full-time in bar work. Despite describing herself as “*environmentally conscious*” already, Rachel had never been involved with beekeeping before. Following involvement, Rachel now teaches beekeeping to others, as a qualified tutor, and is in the early stages of developing her own business as a full-time beekeeper. This incorporates teaching, as well as making and selling a range of items created from hive by-products.

Participation in BEE You involved weekly classroom sessions and theory at first, prior to introduction of practical elements. This included understanding creation and care of beehives and apiaries. Due to Rachel’s personal preference for kinaesthetic learning, she fed back that the four hour classroom sessions were overly long; however, taking on board this feedback, the project has now shortened the length of these sessions.

Rachel suggested that the opportunity to interact with like-minded people, and to try out the practical elements of bee-keeping were of particular importance to her. She described that the first visit to the beehives “*fascinated*” her, and related that she had the “*biggest smile*” on her face, despite being initially apprehensive.

“Being with other like-minded individuals has given me increased hope for the future of the planet, allowed me to believe in myself and completely changed my future career (for the better)!”

Following completion of the initial course, Rachel described how she was keen to remain involved, and, picking-up on this interest, the project offered Rachel an opportunity to pursue qualifications (*Level 3 Education & Training and Level 3 Certificate Assessing Vocational Achievement*) to enable her to come on board with the organisation as a bee-keeping tutor. Rachel was then able to take on a paid position as a self-employed tutor teaching a class of her own. Participants were sourced by Blackburn House, and this enabled Rachel to share what she had learned through her time with BEE You.

Moreover, as a result of BEE You, Rachel reported a number of benefits. In addition to influencing her career trajectory, this includes, for example: improvements to her mental health and wellbeing as a result of spending increased time outdoors; ability to network with like-minded people and contacts, which has improved her access to a range of opportunities; and, the knowledge and skills gained.

Further, the onset of the pandemic in 2020 allowed Rachel space to draw up business plans with a view to pursuing bee-keeping full-time, and to focus on networking with people, as well as developing new product lines such as lip balms and beeswax food wraps. Rachel described that becoming a bee-keeper wouldn’t have crossed her mind prior to getting involved with BEE You, as she wasn’t aware it was possible to centre a viable career around it.

Moreover, Rachel is passionate about widening access to beekeeping, particularly for under-represented communities. She describes that typically, bee-keeping is an expensive hobby, primarily aimed at a demographic of middle-class, middle-aged white men, so she is keen to make it more accessible. For urban communities in particular, Rachel wishes to improve awareness of bee-keeping as a viable option, particularly for those who may not have existing qualifications. Additionally, she is keen to enable people to receive the mental health benefits of being more closely involved with nature, and hopes to support people to develop micro-communities of support.

In aid of this pursuit, Rachel has set-up as a Community Interest Company (CIC) to improve her access to funding, and, in turn, to enable her to get more people involved with bee-keeping. Further, Rachel recently relocated from Liverpool, to a village in the East Midlands, and plans to connect with a community of beekeepers there and to further establish her business.

“I never expected beekeeping to grasp my interest and curiosity in the way that it has and it’s completely changed my path for the future. I want to expand the reach of people who have access to education about beekeeping.”