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**REPORT FOR ULSTER WILDLIFE: AN EVALUATION
OF THE GRASSROOTS CHALLENGE PROJECT 2019-20**

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Report for Ulster Wildlife: An evaluation of the Grassroots Challenge Project 2019-20

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Glossary of terms

Closed question: a question with a defined set of responses to choose from. For example; yes, no, not sure or strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.

Mean scores: A mean is the same as an average score.

N= in this study, this is shorthand for 'number of respondents'. For example, n=36 means that 36 young people answered the specific question being presented.

Open question: a question that does not have a defined set of responses to choose from. Respondents are presented with a blank space to provide their own answer.

Reliability: there are various different reliability constructs and measures in research. In the current study, a statistical test called Cronbach's alpha was used. This measures the internal consistency of a group of questions (a scale) to see how closely related a set of questions are as a group. In other words, if they belong together (are about the same thing) and have been understood by the respondents as belonging together.

Scale: a group of questions that belong together as they are about the same concept and/or are measuring the same construct.

Subscales: this is a smaller set of questions with a larger scale, which are about part of a concept and/or are measuring a theme within a larger scale.

Executive summary

This report presents findings from an evaluation of Ulster Wildlife's Grassroots Challenge Project, together with young people's views, opinions and concerns about environmental issues and actions, which will be used to inform future work. The Grassroots Challenge project has been running since 2015 and this evaluation presents evidence from activities conducted between September 2019 and March 2020. Unfortunately, due to the lockdown restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the evaluation is more limited than originally planned and only includes groups that took part in Grassroots Challenge activities before lockdown and were able to complete the evaluation measures. The reader should keep in mind the limitations of the sample size, particularly in relation to the questionnaire data, when reading this report.

The Grassroots Challenge gives young people aged 11 – 24 the opportunity to gain essential skills, knowledge and training to take action for wildlife in their local area, whilst also improving their confidence, employability and well-being. The overall aim of the project is to link with established structures and groups to offer opportunities for young people to develop skills and knowledge and to design and deliver environmental projects that will enhance their local area and engage their communities in environmental action. It is a five-year project and will run until March 2021. The project involves three specific groups of young people in Northern Ireland: Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster, young people taking part in various Duke of Edinburgh's Award schemes and young people who attend several Special Schools. The project also has an established Youth Forum. The Grassroots Challenge project is one of 31 projects across the UK, which make up the 'Our Bright Future' partnership. This is a National Lottery Community Funded partnership led by the Wildlife Trusts, bringing together the youth and environmental sectors.

Seven groups of young people took part in the evaluation. Three of these groups completed pre-project and post-project questionnaires (all were Duke of Edinburgh's Award schemes). In total, 36 young people completed the pre-project questionnaire and 31 young people completed the post-project questionnaire. All seven of the groups took part in focus groups to evaluate the project. There was one focus group with the Grassroots Challenge Youth Forum and two with young people from various Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster. There were three focus groups with young people taking part in various Duke of Edinburgh's Award schemes, one focus group with a group of young men who completed Grassroots Challenge activities as part of an Education Authority sponsored programme. There was also a focus group with teachers from Special Needs schools, whose students took part in Grassroots Challenge activities.

This report presents evidence that the Grassroots Challenge Project benefits the young people involved across all the evaluation statements, which represent the aims of the project. The young people who took part rated their connectness to nature as higher at the end of the project activities, more of them said they would now take part in environmental/nature/wildlife actions. They rated their overall Leadership Competence as a little higher at the end of the project but they rated their perceptions of their ability to influence environmental policy

decisions as much higher at the end of the project. They also recognised that making a difference for nature makes a difference for them.

More of the young people who completed the questionnaires said they would now take part in environmental/nature/wildlife actions, as a result of completing their Grassroots Challenge Project activities. For the most part, these young people said this was because they have enjoyed these types of activities and have a better understanding of the importance of such actions/helping the environment. In the focus groups, responses were mixed in relation to questions around whether or not young people can make a difference for nature. They cited a lack of opportunity as well as a general limited awareness of environmental issues among young people, that many do not care and that there is a stigma around being involved in environmental issues.

During the focus groups the majority of young people said they want to make a difference for nature but cited a lack of opportunities and/or the promotion of existing ones as a major issue. Many of the young people also explained that there should be more opportunities, publicised using a greater variety of mediums. They were positive about the Grassroots Challenge Project and would like to do more of this. Those representing Young Farmers Clubs would like the Project to be tailored for their group.

It can be concluded that whilst most of the participants involved in the focus groups would like to be involved in making a difference for nature, there is a very clear message that there are not enough opportunities nor mechanisms to do so. They are aware of issues and threats to the environment but these are limited, understood in a very general sense and are often focused on local concerns.

The young people involved in this research were very positive in their evaluation of the Grassroots Challenge Project – in relation to the activities, the benefits of these and the staff involved. They would like to see more Grassroots Challenge type projects and activities and propose that “support” should come from Government and local authorities to include funding and education initiatives.

Whilst the responses on the questionnaires and from the focus groups are from a small group of young people and may not be entirely representative, it is important to note that these young people signed up for and were involved in the Grassroots Challenge Project and may be more positive overall. Therefore, there is much work to be done in relation to perceptions and opinions around making a difference for wildlife. The young people involved in this research have offered some very real and tangible suggestions for those who work in the area in relation to increasing opportunities to get involved in environmental issues and how these should be promoted.

It is recommended that the Project continues to be delivered in its current model to as many groups as possible, so many more young people can benefit. Ulster Wildlife might want to consider some new developments to further meet the specific needs of Young Farmers Clubs. More explicit education around how to go about this, coupled with more opportunities at a local level is recommended. Therefore, the ideal would be a ‘scaling up’ of the Project throughout the Council areas of Northern Ireland. Ulster Wildlife and other stakeholders should carefully consider how such opportunities are promoted and publicised for an audience of young

people. Of all the groups involved in the focus groups, the Youth Forum were the most knowledgeable and empowered – replication of such work with young people is highly recommended.

Given that this evaluation of the Grassroots Challenge Project was impacted by the restrictions around the Covid-19 lockdown, it is also recommended that, if the Grassroots Challenge Project is replicated, it should be evaluated with a higher number of young people in other areas throughout Northern Ireland and beyond for the purposes of comparison beyond a limited sample.

Background

This report presents findings from an evaluation of Ulster Wildlife's Grassroots Challenge Project. The project has been running since 2015 and this evaluation presents evidence from activities conducted between September 2019 and March 2020. This report also presents young people's views, opinions and concerns about environmental issues and actions, which will be used to inform future work. Unfortunately, due to the lockdown restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the evaluation is more limited than originally planned and only includes groups that took part in Grassroots Challenge activities before lockdown and were able to complete the evaluation measures.

Seven groups of young people took part in the evaluation. Three of these groups completed pre-project and post-project questionnaires (all were Duke of Edinburgh's Award schemes). In total, 36 young people completed the pre-project questionnaire and 31 young people completed the post-project questionnaire. All seven of the groups took part in focus groups to evaluate the project. There was one focus group with the Grassroots Challenge Youth Forum and two with young people from various Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster. There were three focus groups with young people taking part in various Duke of Edinburgh's Award schemes and one focus group with a group of young men who completed Grassroots Challenge activities as part of an Education Authority sponsored programme. There was also a focus group with teachers from Special Needs schools whose students took part in Grassroots Challenge activities.

This report will outline the background to the Grassroots Challenge Project and its evaluation to include details on the sample, the measures used for each of the outcomes under consideration, the findings (from the questionnaire and focus groups) as well as conclusions and recommendations.

1.1 The Grassroots Challenge Project

The Grassroots Challenge gives young people aged 11 – 24 the opportunity to gain essential skills, knowledge and training to take action for wildlife in their local area, whilst also improving their confidence, employability and well-being. The overall aim of the project is:

Linking with established structures including Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster and Duke of Edinburgh's Award to offer opportunities for young people to develop skills and knowledge and to design and deliver environmental projects which will enhance their local area and engage their communities in environmental action.

It is a five-year project and will run until March 2021. The project involves three specific groups of young people in Northern Ireland: Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster, young people taking part in various Duke of Edinburgh's Award schemes and young people who attend several Special Schools. The project also has an established Youth Forum. The Grassroots Challenge project is one of 31 projects across the UK, which make up the 'Our Bright Future' partnership. This

is a National Lottery Community Funded partnership led by the Wildlife Trusts, bringing together the youth and environmental sectors.

All projects within the Our Bright Future portfolio contribute to the four overall outcomes as follows:

- 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.
- Outcome 2) The Our Bright Future programme has had positive impacts on the environment and local communities.
- Outcome 3) The Our Bright Future programme has influenced change and created a legacy.
- Outcome 4) The Our Bright Future programme utilises an effective partnership working and a youth-led approach, leading to stronger outcomes for young people and the environment.

1.2 The Evaluation

Acting as an external evaluator, Queen's University Belfast was commissioned by Ulster Wildlife to evaluate their Grassroots Challenge Project. The evaluation included two questionnaires, which three groups of young people completed before they took part in their Grassroots Challenge activity and after their activity was complete (June 2019). It also comprised focus groups with seven groups of young people and one group of teachers from Special Schools. The evaluation was given full ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast. An amendment to the evaluation as a result of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions was also given ethical clearance by the Ethics Committee in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast. The amendments included email collection of some post-project questionnaires and a shift to online focus groups, as opposed to the originally planned face-to-face focus groups.

The evaluation set out to consider, specifically, if participation in the Grassroots Challenge project has delivered positive change for young people against the following statements:

- I feel connected to nature and wildlife
- I want to make a difference for nature and wildlife
- I feel I can make a difference for nature and wildlife
- Making a difference for nature and wildlife also makes a difference for me

In order to inform the development of future work to engage young people with nature and the environment Ulster Wildlife also requested that the evaluation gather young people's views, opinions and concerns regarding:

- The threats and opportunities around key environmental issues such as climate change, plastic pollution and biodiversity loss
- How they want to be involved in key environmental issues and how they see their role in creating change and making a difference
- The support they would like to help them to take action for the environment

Table 1 presents all the measures used, in line with the outcomes (or views, opinions and concerns) they evaluated. In order to get a picture of the sample of young involved in the evaluation, some background factors were also included in the questionnaire: age, gender and the organization they were working with a part of the Grassroots Challenge Project. With the aim of ascertaining young people's previous experience with environmental/nature/wildlife actions they were also asked if they had taken part in such actions in the past and, if yes, what these were and if not, why not.

The post-project questionnaire then asked if they would now take part in environmental/nature/wildlife actions after their involvement with the Grassroots Challenge Project.

In the focus groups, participants were also asked to reflect on their experience of the Grassroots Challenge project and what they enjoyed the most/least and why.

Outcome	Measures/questions
Outcome statements	
I feel connected to nature and wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Connectedness to Nature scale (Mayer and Frantz, 2004)
I want to make a difference for nature and wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions on previous experience with environmental/nature/wildlife actions (pre-project questionnaire) Questions on likelihood of future environmental/nature/wildlife actions (post-project questionnaire) Focus group questions 6, 7
I feel I can make a difference for nature and wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) (Peterson et al., 2000) Focus group questions 8, 9
Making a difference for nature and wildlife also makes a difference for me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statements related to the benefits for young people when they help nature (<i>This measure was developed using the summary of responses given by attendees at the Grassroots Challenge Celebration Event in November 2018. The attendees were responding to a question posed by the Grassroots Challenge Youth Forum: 'How do young people benefit from helping nature?'</i>)
Views, opinions and concerns	
The threats and opportunities around key environmental issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale (Dunlap et al., 2000) Focus group questions 3, 4, 5
How young people want to be involved in key environmental issues and their role in creating change and making a difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group questions 6, 7
The support young people would like to help them to take action for the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group question 10

Table 1: An outline of the measures/focus group questions used in the evaluation, matched to the outcomes and views, opinions and concerns under consideration for the Grassroots Challenge Project.

A complete list of all the questions, scales and answer choices for the questionnaire(s) are listed in Appendix 1. An outline of the questions used for the focus groups are outlined in

Appendix 2. The adapted Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) (Peterson et al., 2000) considered two dimensions of youth empowerment (leadership competence and policy control). The original SPCS-Y was used in the context of attachment to community and reduction of alcohol/drug use. However, whilst appropriate in relation to youth empowerment it was adapted to consider youth empowerment in relation to the environment. Therefore, the scale used in this evaluation comprised:

- The Leadership Competence subscale (questions 1-8). This subscale remained unchanged from that presented by Peterson et al. (2000)
- The Policy Control subscale (questions 9-17). This subscale was reworded to replace reference to school and/or community with 'environment', as relevant to this evaluation. For the sake of clarity, the original questions from this scale, as used by Peterson et al. (2000) are presented alongside the adapted versions in Appendix 1.

Section 2 will present the findings from the measures used to examine the outcome statements, section 3 considers the findings related to the views, opinions and concerns under consideration to inform the development of Ulster Wildlife's future work to engage young people with nature and the environment. The young people's responses to the questions asking them to evaluate the Project (liked least/most) are presented in Section 4 whilst Section 5 brings together the key findings, conclusions and recommendations. A summary of views, to include quotes, from the young people and teachers involved in the focus groups will also be presented throughout the report.

1.3 The sample

A total of 36 young people completed the pre-project questionnaire and 31 young people completed the post-project questionnaire. Some of the post-project questionnaires were posted to the researcher and/or sent by email (anonymously) due to the lockdown restrictions as a result of Covid-19. This accounts for the difference in response rate between pre and post project questionnaires. Further details on the sample of 36 young people who completed the questionnaire are outlined below:

- six were aged 13-14, seven were 15-16 years old, 20 were aged 17-18 and the remaining three were 19-23 years old
- 25 respondents were male and 11 were female
- 21 respondents had taken part in a week long residential as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award, 11 respondents had taken part in an environmental volunteer group as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's Bronze Award, and the remaining five respondents had taken part in a volunteer allotment group as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's Bronze Award.

It is important to note that the planned questionnaire sample was much larger (100+). However, recruitment was severely impeded by the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown restrictions. Many of the groups in the original sample did not complete their planned activities whilst other groups did not have the opportunity to start.

In total, 30 young people and 5 teachers (in Special Schools) took part in the focus groups. The focus groups were conducted with the following representative groups, all of whom had taken part in Grassroots Challenge activities:

- Two groups of young people from a variety of Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster
- One environmental volunteering group (who completed activities as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's Award) at Mount Stewart Estate.
- One environmental volunteering group (who completed activities as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's Award) at the Grassroots Challenge Allotment.
- One group who had completed a week long residential (as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award)
- One group of young men who completed Grassroots Challenge activities as part of an Education Authority sponsored programme
- One group of representatives from the Grassroots Challenge Youth Forum
- One group of teachers whose students had taken part in various Grassroots Challenge Activities.

Two of the focus groups were conducted face to face (the residential group and the Grassroots Challenge Youth Forum). The remaining focus groups were conducted online, through Microsoft Teams, as approved by the Ethics Committee in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast. It is important to note that face-to-face focus groups were planned for all groups. However, the restrictions imposed because of the Covid-19 lockdown meant that this was not possible. The researcher had also originally planned to visit the Special Schools involved to speak to the young people directly but this was not possible. Instead, the teachers volunteered to speak about the project through an online focus group.

1.4 Data analyses and statistical reliability

For this evaluation, two types of data were collected – firstly, *quantitative data* in the form of closed questions on the online questionnaire. The closed questions had a specific set of options for young people to select as their response. Secondly, *qualitative data* in the form of open response questions (where young could write in their own answers) on the questionnaire and focus group discussions. The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed in different ways and a summary of the process of analyses for both sets of data are outlined in sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.2.

1.4.1 Analyses of the quantitative data

The questionnaire data were collected using paper based questionnaires and inputted in the format of a Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) file. All of the quantitative data analyses were conducted using SPSS, to include:

- The creation of new variables to represent total score on relevant scales (groups of questions)
- Statistical reliability of the relevant scales (groups of questions) – the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to calculate the statistical reliability of relevant scales. This considers whether or not similar questions within a scale resulted in similar scores (and were therefore understood as intended). Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2011) stated that, in general, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.60 to 0.69 is marginally/minimally reliable, 0.70 to 0.79 is reliable, 0.80 to 0.90 is highly reliable

and >0.90 is very highly reliable. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients (pre activities questionnaire) and their interpretations for the scales presented in this report are:

- The Connectness to Nature scale (Mayer and Frantz, 2004): $\alpha=0.57$. This is borderline reliable
- The New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale (Dunlap et al., 2000): $\alpha=0.30$. This is not reliable
- Adapted Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) (Peterson et al., 2000)
 - Leadership competence subscale ($\alpha=0.51$). This is borderline reliable
 - Policy control subscale ($\alpha=0.61$). This is marginally/minimally reliable
- Statements related to the 'Benefits for young people when they help nature': $\alpha=0.93$. This is very highly reliable

These results mean that the Policy control subscale from the adapted SPCS-Y has acceptable reliability and can be presented as a scale. The Connectness to Nature scale and the Leadership Competence subscale from the adapted SPCS-Y show borderline reliability and the reader should keep this in mind when interpreting the results from these scales. The New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) will not be presented as a scale in this report as it falls well below the accepted value. The newly created measure, which includes statements related to the benefits for young people when they help nature, is showing as a very highly reliable scale and will be presented as such. However, the reader should note that this is a new scale and has not been through a due process of reliability and validity testing with a large/diverse sample. Further work is required for this scale. It is also important to note that this study includes a very small sample and, as a result, the reliability score may not be a useful indicator.

- Percentage of responses to questions – in other words the overall percentage for each of the response options for each question was calculated.
- Mean scores (averages) of relevant individual questions and scales (groups of questions). It will be made clear throughout the report if a mean score is presented for relevant scales.

1.4.2 Analyses of the qualitative data

Two methods were used to collect qualitative data: open questions on the questionnaires and focus groups. The open questions on the questionnaire gave the young people an opportunity to write their own answers. These questions are identified in Appendix 1 with the phrase '*open response*' next to them (in the 'Response options/response groups' column of the table). The focus groups' discussions were audio recorded (with full ethical clearance for this to include consent from teachers, parents/guardians and the young people themselves). The focus groups' discussions were transcribed and anonymised – that is, names and/or any other identifying features (such as school/group name) were not mentioned. For example, participants were referred to as "Participant 1, Participant 2..." and so on.

Data from the open questions and the focus groups were then themed and coded into similar 'groups' of responses. This process was similar to Chi's (1997) qualitative analysis procedure. This means that the comments/responses were categorised according to similarity.

Evaluation of outcome statements

3.1 I feel connected to nature and wildlife

Connection to nature was evaluated using Mayer and Frantz's (2004) Connectness to Nature scale, which participants responded to on their pre and post-project questionnaires. This measure was designed to look at an individual's affective, experiential connection to nature. It is based on Leopold's (1949) famous assertion that in order for people to effectively deal with environmental issues they need to feel connected to the natural world. Leopold (1949) claimed that this means we need to consider the level to which people see themselves as belonging to the natural world, feel affinity to it, and perceive that they belong to the natural world as much as the natural world belongs to them and that people see their welfare as interconnected to the natural world.

Respondents were asked to answer each of these questions in terms of the way they generally feel. They were told that there are no right or wrong answers and to choose one answer from the scale next to each statement as honestly and candidly as they could, based on what they are presently experiencing. The response options on the scale were Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree.

The overall scores on the Connectness to Nature items were also calculated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the most positive score. For the young people in this sample, the mean Connectness to Nature scores was **3.20** (n=35, SD=0.342) at pre-project and **3.47** (n=31, SD=0.390) at post-project. These findings show that the young people who took part in the 2019-20 Grassroots Challenge Project rated their overall connectedness to nature as higher at the end of the project.

Figure 1 presents a bar graph showing the **percentage of positive responses** from the pre and post project questionnaires for all items on the Connectness to Nature (Mayer and Frantz's, 2004) scale. The wording of each item is presented under the bar graph.

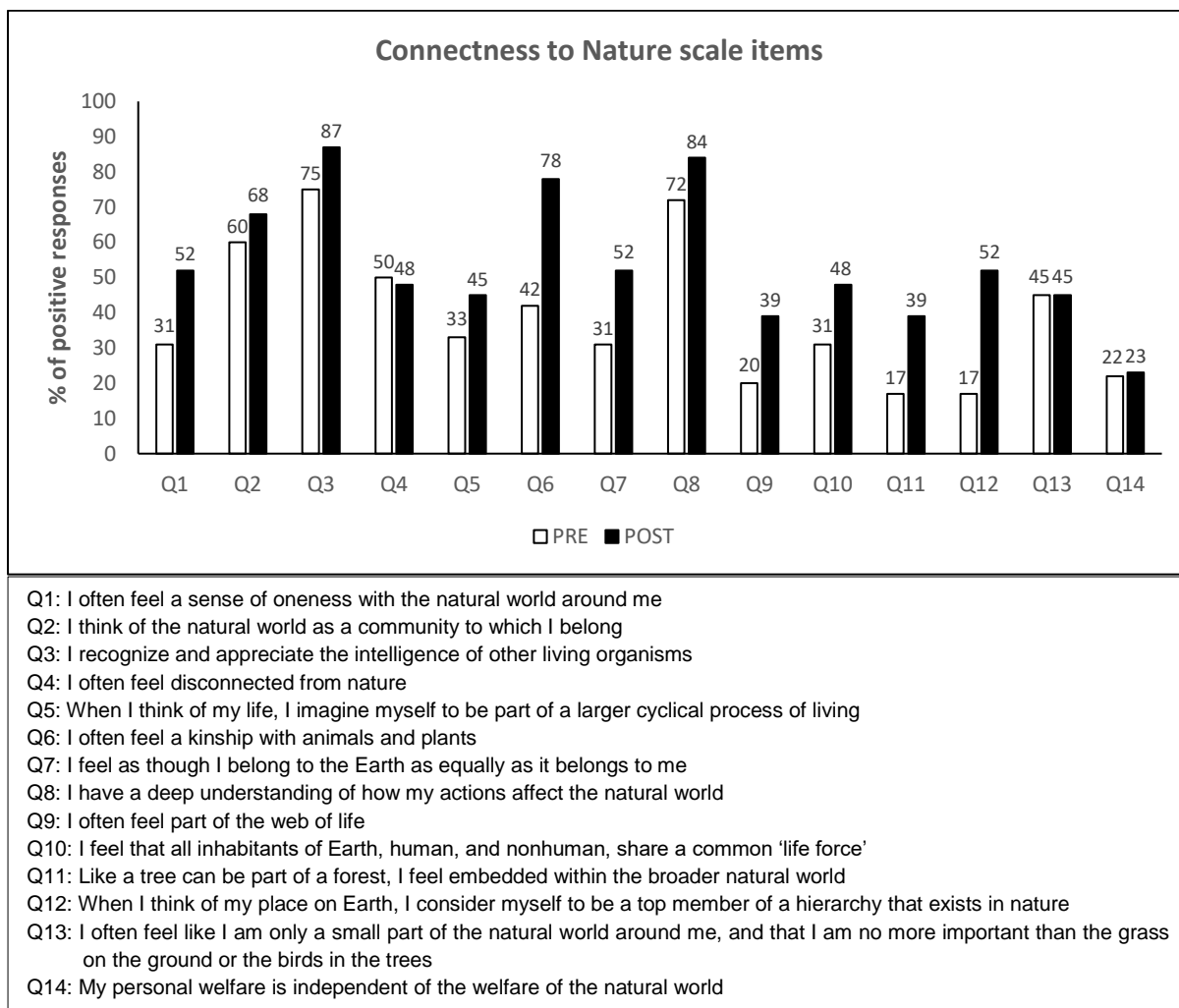


Figure 1: A bar graph to show the percentage of positive responses for the items on the Connectness to Nature Scale (Mayer and Frantz, 2004) (pre and post). n=36 (pre), 31 (post)

Figure 1 shows that, post-project, the young people in this sample gave a higher percentage of positive responses for 12 out of the 14 items on the Connectness to Nature scale. They were marginally less positive in their responses of question 4 (feeling disconnected to nature) and reported the same percentage of positive responses, post-project, for question 13 (feeling like a small part of the natural world, no more important that the grass of birds). Overall, the young people in this sample evidenced an improvement in how they rated their connectness to nature, after their involved in the Grassroots Challenge Project. However, it is important to note that this is from a small sample.

3.2 I want to make a difference for nature and wildlife

In order to consider whether or not the young people in this sample want to make a difference for nature and wildlife they were asked specific questions in the pre-project questionnaire:

- “Have you been involved in environmental/nature/wildlife actions in the past?” This was followed up with “If yes, what were they?” or “If no, why not?”

By way of comparison in the post-project questionnaire, the respondents were then asked if their thoughts on being involved in such actions have changed as a result of their involvement

in the Grassroots Challenge Project. So, they were asked the following questions on the post-project questionnaire:

- “Now that you have completed your Grassroots Challenge Project activity, do you think you would get involved in environmental/nature/wildlife actions in the future?” This was followed up with “If yes, why would you now get involved?” or “If no, why would you not get involved?”

Figure 2 presents the **percentage of responses** for the pre and post-project questions related to environmental/nature/wildlife actions.

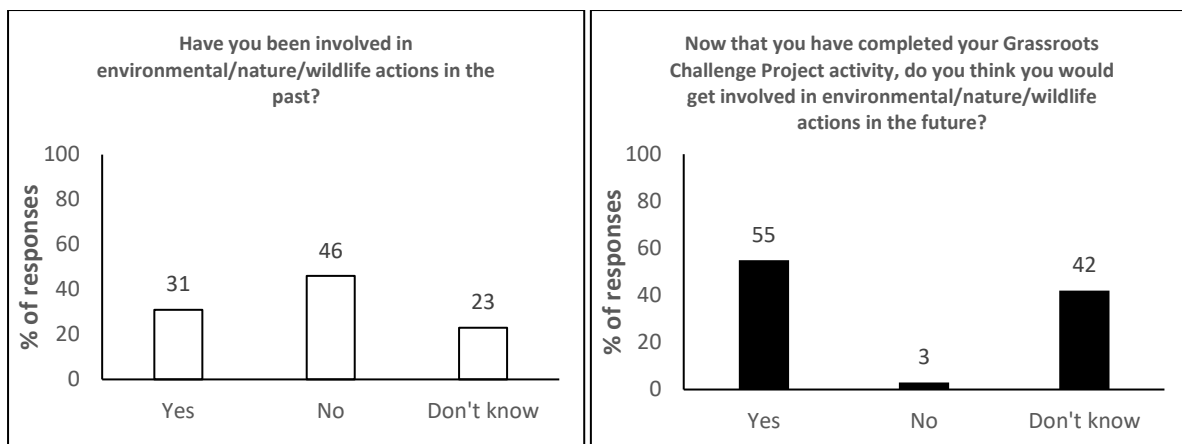


Figure 2: Bar graphs to show the percentage of responses on the pre and post-project questionnaires for items related to environmental/nature/wildlife actions. n=35 (pre), 31 (post)

A higher percentage of young people (6 more at post-project) said they would now take part in environmental/nature/wildlife actions as a result of completing their Grassroots Challenge Project activities. Of those who said they have been involved in such actions before, the majority (7 out of 11 responses) talked about primary school projects or specific local programmes (Peninsula Explorers programme = 5; Scouts = 2; Young Farmers activities = 1) and only one said they took part in personal conservation efforts. Some of the reasons given for a lack of involvement in the past focused on a lack of opportunities/nothing close to home (6 responses), no knowledge about such activities (5 responses) as a lack of time (3 responses) or interest (3 responses).

Those who responded positively to getting involved in environmental/nature/wildlife actions in the future said they would do so because they enjoyed it now (6 responses), like learning/have a better understanding of the environment (6 responses), have realised importance of helping the environment (5 responses) or it makes them feel good (2 responses). Other young people said they feel more connected to nature (1 response), feel more able to participate now (1 response) and are aware of more opportunities (1 response).

It is interesting to note that there was an increase in the number of young people who responded “Don’t know” to this questions in their post-project questionnaires - 5 more in relation to environmental/nature/wildlife actions.

In the focus groups, the young people were asked if they would like to be involved in tackling these environmental issues? And, if so, why and how? They were also asked if there are currently opportunities to get involved and what mechanisms already exist for getting involved

in tackling environmental issues? The majority of young people who took part in the focus groups said they would like to be involved but many felt this was only possible on “a *small scale*”, with the exception of those in the Youth Forum who described young people as “*future leaders*”, “*the next generation*” who will tackle environmental issues.

When talking further about existing opportunities and mechanisms, the majority said that these were very limited and referenced a narrow range of opportunities to include “*school*”, “*scouts*” and a few community based projects. The most frequently mentioned mechanism was “*Grassroots Challenge*”. When questioned further on their awareness of such opportunities, many of the young people, across the different focus groups, cited a lack of opportunities and/or the promotion of existing ones as a major issue. Many of the young people also explained that there should be more of this, using a greater variety of mediums:

I don't know, just you never – like if there is [opportunities], they're not promoted well, I just don't think there is any around for us. (DofE residential)

Getting the word out because if an event is not well advertised, nobody is going to turn up so it's the same with trying to get people to participate in the environment, if it's not advertised, nobody knows what's happening. (DofE residential)

Even like programmes on TV, if we can get more – the likes of Countryfile there would be a good one because it's covering all different points every week and they're seeing different bits and different people doing conservation and a lot of the farming community and a lot of the farming community would watch it on a Sunday afternoon and it is good, gives people ideas so I'll go out and organise a wee litter pick in my local area or go out and build a few squirrel boxes or build a few bird nests for – you know to help the woodland down the road to help more birds build up. So, programme like that. (DofE residential)

I was just going to say that like social media I think is the main way you're going to try and get youth involved. Like if you can get the big You Tube or Instagram people, like they're the ones that are role models so if you can get them involved then you'll be doing good and young people will be more inclined to do something. (DofE residential)

There's not enough opportunities for young people really. I think the only... a lot of young people would be very interested to help out in nature, but they just don't know how, and something like Ulster Wildlife is a great tool for young people to maybe put their energy to use, but a lot of people don't know it, know about it, and there needs to be more things like it also. [Youth Forum]

So maybe even if there was some sort of, an information pack or something that could source... if there's some way of sourcing the various support groups around like councils and community groups and things that maybe have clubs going on, that we could be aware of those, like a central service or something maybe, I don't know, to help children even for volunteering for Duke of Ed and things like that, there could be places they could work with for that. [SEN Teachers]

.Was just going to say that same point about planting the trees and things that we were talking about, maybe having more detailed information evenings and maybe

that's available somewhere but having that maybe more advertised. [Young Farmers]

Like, flyers. Every young kid goes into a chippy, and they look at the wall and they see a poster. It's a good way of advertising. [EA group]

Because, that's who young people look up to nowadays, like. Influencers, like footballers and all, see? You'd say a footballer's been more... [that's] better... influencers, that would say about it. [EA group]

In summary, the majority of young people in this study want to be involved and make a difference for nature. There was an increase in interest among those who completed the questionnaires. They do not feel that there are enough mechanisms and opportunities to get involved and those which are available are not publicised enough.

3.3 I feel I can make a difference for nature and wildlife

The concept of youth empowerment was considered in order to determine if the young people in this study feel they can make a difference for nature. An adapted version of the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) (Peterson et al., 2000) was selected as it considers two constructs relevant to the aims of the Grassroots Challenge Project: Leadership Competence and Policy Control. According to Peterson et al. (2000, p.594) Leadership Competence is defined as “*people's self-perceptions of their skill at organizing a group of people*” and Policy Control is defined as “*people's self-perceptions of their ability to influence policy decisions in an organization or community*”.

For the purposes of evaluating the Grassroots Challenge Project the Leadership Competence questions were relevant and were not reworded. However, the Policy Control questions were reworded to reference making a difference for nature and wildlife. The original Policy Control questions in Peterson et al.'s (2000) study were used in the context of attachment to community and reduction of alcohol/drug use. For example, the original question “*I enjoy participation because I want to have as much say in my community or school as possible*” was reworded to “*I enjoy participation because I want to have as much say in environmental issues as possible*”. A full list of the original and adapted/reworded questions from the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) is given in Appendix 1.

On the questionnaire, respondents were asked to consider the list of statements about leadership and getting involved in environmental issues. It was explained that there are no right or wrong answers and that they should simply tick how much they agree, or disagree, with each sentence. The response options on the scale were Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree.

The overall scores for both subscales (Leadership Competence and the adapted Policy Control subscale) were calculated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the most positive score. For the young people in this sample, the mean Leadership Competence score was **3.42** (n=32, SD=0.451) at pre-project and **3.47** (n=29, SD=0.438) at post-project. The mean scores on the adapted Policy Control subscale were **3.20** (n=36, SD=0.429) at pre-project and **3.51** (n=29, SD=0.437) at post-project. These findings show that the young people who took part in the 2019-20 Grassroots Challenge Project rated their overall Leadership Competence as a little

higher at the end of the project but they rated their perceptions of their ability to influence environmental policy decisions as much higher at the end of the project. Whilst this is a positive trend, it is also important to keep in mind that these results are from a small sample and it would be beneficial to repeat this measure with a much larger sample.

Figure 3 presents a bar graph showing the **percentage of positive responses** from the pre and post project questionnaires for all items on Peterson et al.'s (2000) Leadership Competence scale.

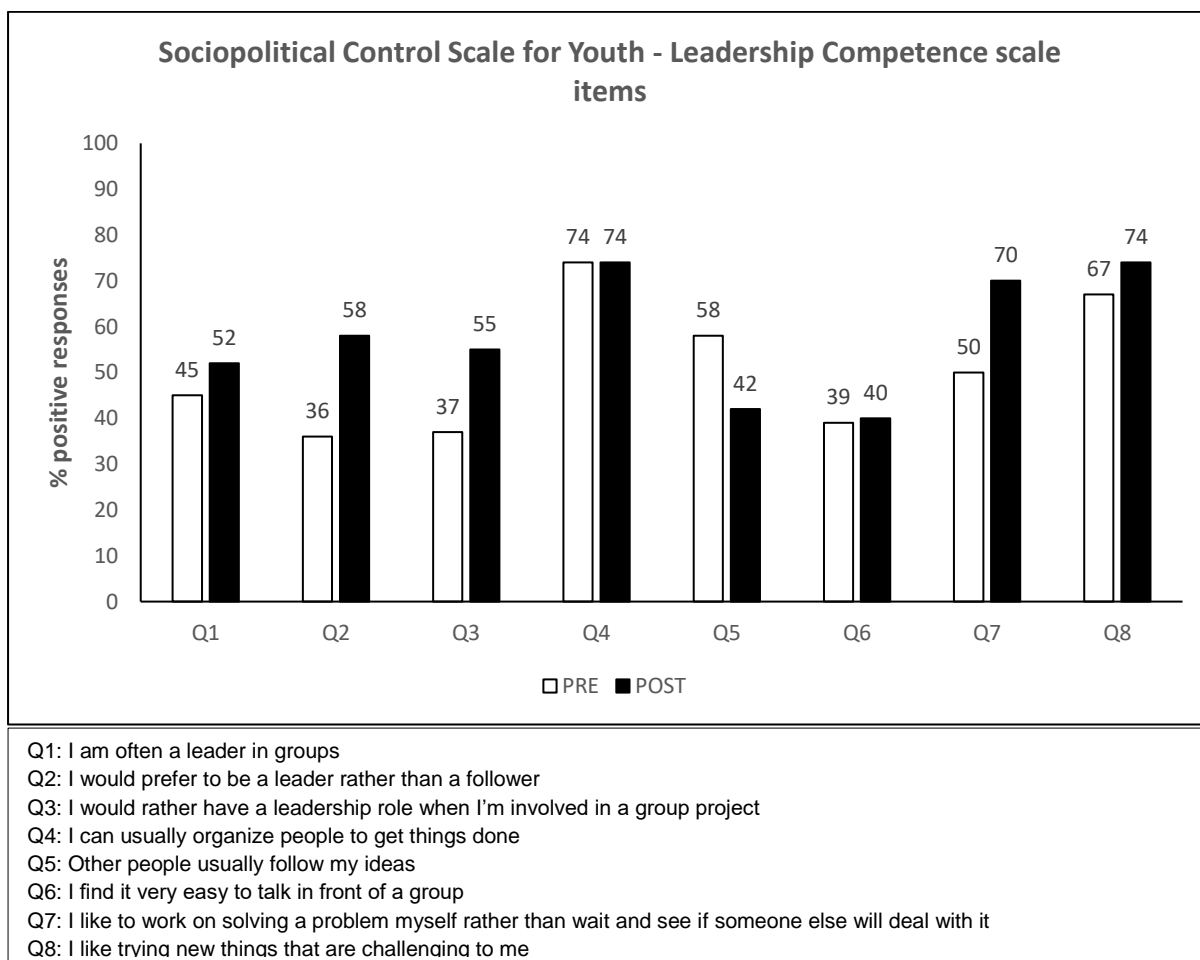


Figure 3: A bar graph to show the percentage of positive responses for items on the Leadership Competence scale from the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) (Peterson et al., 2000)(pre and post). n=36 (pre), 31 (post)

Figure 3 shows that, post-project, the young people in this sample gave a higher percentage of positive responses for 6 out of the 8 items on the Leadership Competence scale. They gave the same percentage of positive responses, pre and post project, for one item (“I can usually organise people to get things done”) and reported a lower percentage of positive responses of one item (“Other people usually follow my ideas”). This means that the young people in this sample were more positive in relation to their self-perceptions of their skills at organising a group of people, after taking part in the Grassroots Challenge Project.

Figure 4 presents a bar graph showing the **percentage of positive responses** from the pre and post project questionnaires for all items on the adapted Policy Control scale, based on Peterson et al.'s (2000) Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y).

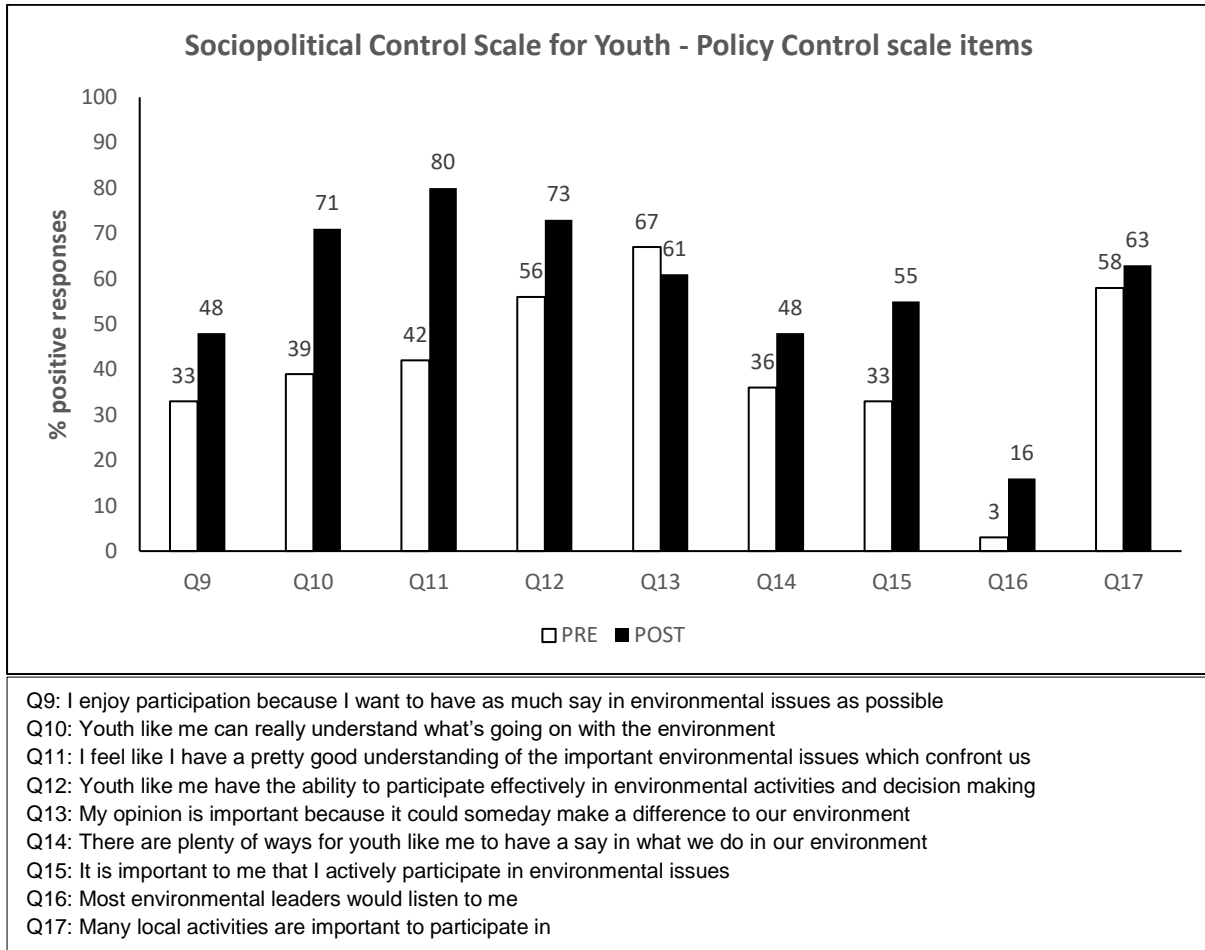


Figure 4: A bar graph to show the percentage of positive responses for items on the adapted Policy Control scale from the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) (Peterson et al., 2000)(pre and post). n=36 (pre), 31 (post)

It is evident from Figure 4 that the young people in this sample gave a higher percentage of positive responses to 8 out of the 9 items on the adapted Policy Control scale, after taking part in the Grassroots Challenge Project. It is interesting to note the increase in the number of respondents answered positively to the two questions (Q10 and Q11) related to knowledge and understanding of environmental issues. They were less positive about one item (“My opinion is important because it could someday make a difference to our environment”). This means that the young people in this sample had a more positive self-perception of their ability to influence policy decisions related to the environment, after taking part in the Grassroots Challenge Project.

In the focus groups, responses were mixed in relation to questions around whether or not young people can make a difference for nature. As already mentioned in section 3.2, many felt they could only do this on a small scale and that opportunities (and the promotion of these) was limited. However, several of young people in the focus groups talked about how Grassroots Challenge made them feel they could get involved and that there should be more activities/opportunities like those:

It's bringing a lot of people in for sure but it's not spread out over the whole of Northern Ireland, it's not everywhere. [DofE volunteering group]

If there's opportunities to actually engage and actually have a bit of fun at the same time. [DofE residential]

I think it's... that following from that because the Grassroots Challenge is quite really unique and there's nothing really like it in Northern Ireland. There's not enough opportunities, so there are lots of... there's more things that I want to be involved in with the Grassroots like doing the allotment days and volunteering and stuff, but to get there it's like a two hour drive for me, and so there's nothing close by that I can do that's similar. That's the closest thing to me. [Youth Forum]

There's not enough opportunities for young people really. I think the only... a lot of young people would be very interested to help out in nature, but they just don't know how, and something like Ulster Wildlife is a great tool for young people to maybe put their energy to use, but a lot of people don't know it, know about it, and there needs to be more things like it also. [Youth Forum]

No. It's not easily achieved. As [Participant name] says, if you say Ulster Wildlife is a bunch of old people... I actually find Grassroots the better, quite good, because... and actually it makes you just more involved and learn lots in a way... [Young Farmers]

The two groups of Young Farmers also talked specifically about several of the benefits of the Grassroots Challenge project but discussed how it could be made more applicable to Young Farmers, as a distinct group:

We were kind of scared that none of the members would really embrace it and then to go along to the things and help out at it but a lot more attended than we maybe thought we would, so it's good that way. [Young Farmers]

I would say some of the paperwork for Grassroots [Eco Club Awards] and things that you have to fill out, I think it's just because they're only starting in to Young Farmers clubs but a lot of it is geared towards primary school or secondary school and our meetings and our programme is completely different...we don't really have an official programme and I think that was different for the likes of schools, they have the school building and they can implement changes to the building, whereas our Young Farmers have – we rent a hall so there's only so many changes, so much change you can make there...the paperwork would have asked me things and I would have thought we were really performing badly here but there wasn't much that we could do to implement so I don't know...I've been speaking to some of the Grass Roots ones and that was something they wanted to sort of look in to more and look at the differences because there is obviously huge differences with our club...schools you've got young children and like a lot older adults. So, that was also a difference as well, I think sometimes it was hard to implement certain things just based off that paperwork and things like that. [Young Farmers]

Well people my age, people on the Young Farmer's side... When people see 'Ulster Wildlife' they immediately think of environment, "These people are coming to tell us how to farm, they're going to tell us to do this and do that," but whenever you get to meet some of the staff like they're not like that, but the perception of Ulster Wildlife, that is what a lot of people think, from looking from the outside without getting to

know the staff and all that's involved. But that's something to work on probably, is the brand itself, you know what I mean? [Young Farmers]

Yeah, it needs to be more applicable to Young Farmers Clubs, I think there needs to be a bit more of a variety. [Young Farmers]

Like it's trying to educate young people but it's... The things that they could or can be dealing with... You know, whenever it comes to farming now well like it's... sometimes it's a totally different world. [Young Farmers]

We're a totally different community of people than Duke of Ed people, like the one I was on, on the residential, I was the only person that actually... well not just living in the countryside but worked in the countryside and everyone else had a different perception of the environment than me. [Young Farmers]

When discussing if young people feel they can make a difference for nature, many talked about the barriers to doing this. Aside from a dearth of opportunities, they also talked about a general limited awareness of environmental issues among young people, that many do not care and that there is a stigma around being involved in environmental issues:

There's always like achievements and stuff, and real leaps in conservation, but no-one hears about them, so they sort of go un-noticed unless you're in that sort of community. [Youth Forum]

There's a bit of a stigma and it's kind of weird to like the environment sort of stuff which is, it's not good. [DofE residential]

More specifically, when talking about the climate strikes, one group discussed the negative perception of these and that young people should get involved in other ways:

everybody is talking about it so if you can try and get something big up instead of just seeing people standing out Stormont doing climate change protests and everybody is like, "Oh look at them out there causing hassle", much more people would [get involved]. [DofE residential]

Other issues, cited by individual young people included "Brexit", "a lack of Government at Stormont" (two focus groups were carried out before power sharing was restored at Stormont) and that people do not listen.

In summary, the young people who took part in the 2019-20 Grassroots Challenge Project rated their overall Leadership Competence as a little higher at the end of the project but they rated their perceptions of their ability to influence environmental policy decisions as much higher at the end of the project. In the focus groups, responses were mixed in relation to questions around whether or not young people can make a difference for nature. They cited a lack of opportunity as well as a general limited awareness of environmental issues among young people, that many do not care and that there is a stigma around being involved in environmental issues. However, they were positive about the Grassroots Challenge Project and would like to do more of this. Those representing Young Farmers Clubs would like the Project to be tailored for their group.

3.4 Making a difference for nature and wildlife also makes a difference for me

The final section of the questionnaire presented statements related to the benefits for young people when they help nature. These statements were taken from the responses given by attendees at the Grassroots Challenge Celebration Event in November 2018. The attendees were responding to a question posed by the Grassroots Challenge Youth Forum: '*How do young people benefit from helping nature?*'). The background to the origin of the questions was explained on the questionnaire and respondents were told that the attendees at the event were a mixture of young people (100 young people) and adults (80 adults). Respondents were asked to select how much they agree or disagree with each of the statements and it was explained that here are no right or wrong answers. The response options were: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree.

The overall score was calculated for all 30 statements related to the benefits for young people when they help nature. This was calculated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the most positive score. For the young people in this sample, the mean score was **3.88** (n=33, SD=0.402) at pre-project and **4.18** (n=29, SD=0.451) at post-project. These findings show that the young people who took part in the 2019-20 Grassroots Challenge Project were more positive in their perceptions of the benefits for young people when they help nature, after taking part in the Grassroots Challenge Project.

Figure 5 presents the **percentage of positive responses** for each of the statements related to the benefits for young people when they help nature, on the pre and post project questionnaires.

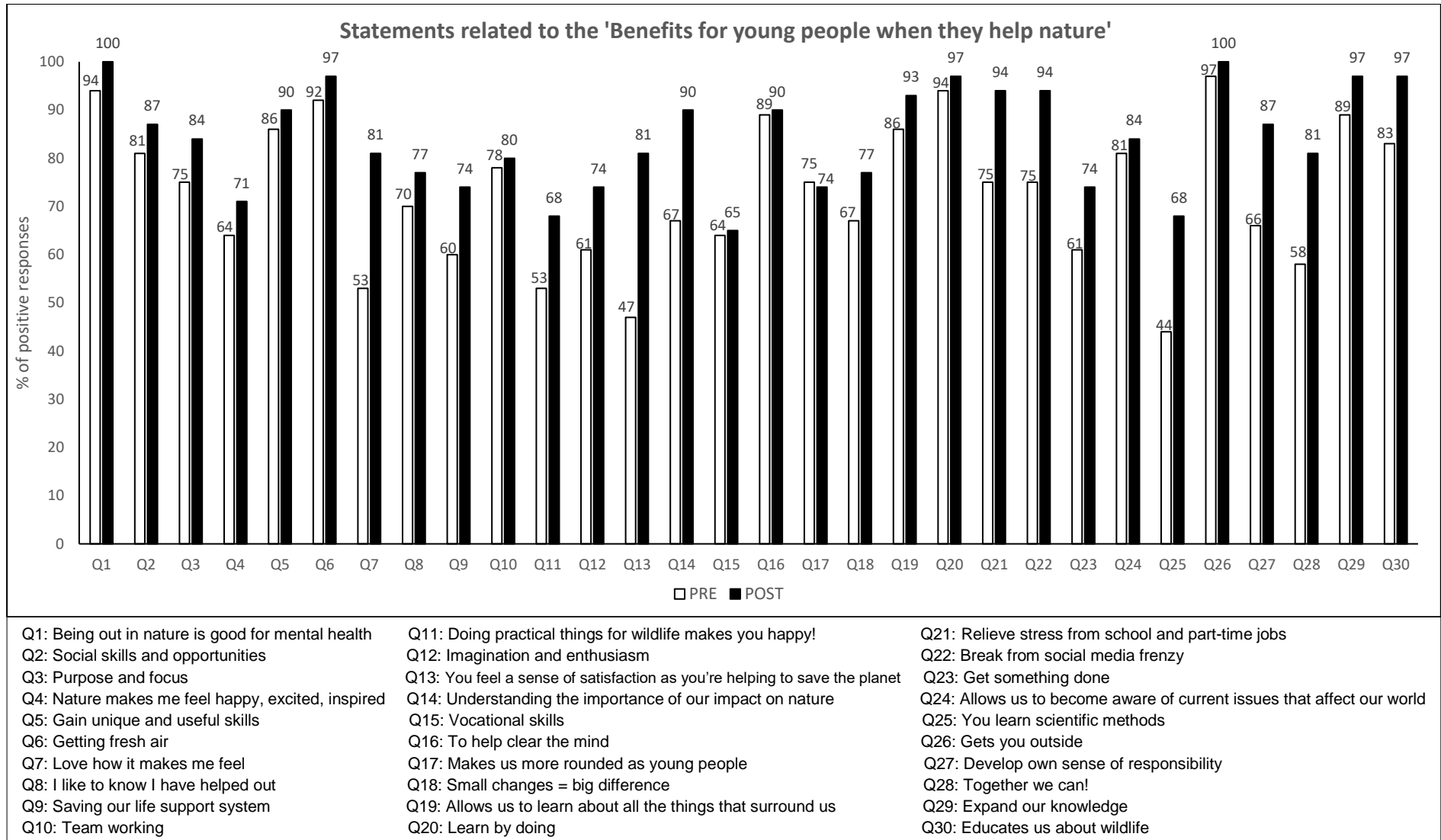


Figure 5: A bar graph to show the percentage of positive responses for statements related to the benefits for young people when they help nature (pre and post). n=36 (pre), 31 (post)

The young people in this sample were more positive about all but one of the 30 statements related to the benefits for young people when they help nature, after taking part in the Grassroots Challenge Project. Only one item evidenced a slight decrease (1%) in positive responses (*"Makes us more rounded as young people"*). It is interesting to note that the statements that evidenced the greatest change at post project were about how you feel (34% increase in positive responses for the statement *"You feel a sense of satisfaction as you're helping to save the planet"* and a 28% increase in positive responses for the statement *"Love how it makes me feel"*). Two statements related to knowledge and understanding also evidenced a larger increase in positive responses (24% increase in positive responses for the statement *"You learn scientific methods"* and a 23% increase in positive responses for the statement *"Understanding the importance of our impact on nature"*).

Views, opinions and concerns related to the environment

4.1 The threats and opportunities around key environmental issues

The New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale (Dunlap et al., 2000) was included on the questionnaire as a measure of the young people's ecological worldview. Dunlap et al. (2000, p. 427) posit that the NEP has become "*a popular measure of environmental concern*" with positive scores on the NEP being seen to reflect a "*proenvironmental orientation*". Therefore, it was considered an appropriate measure for those involved in the Grassroots Challenge Project to ascertain if their involvement made them more or less aware of and concerned with the environment.

On the questionnaire for the current evaluation, the NEP scale was introduced as a list of statements about the relationship between humans and the environment. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement/disagreement with the statements on a five point scale with the following response options: Strongly agree, Mildly agree, Unsure, Mildly disagree or Strongly disagree. They were also told that there are no right or wrong answers.

Figure 6 presents the **percentage of positive responses** for each of the statements on New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale (Dunlap et al., 2000), from the pre and post project questionnaires.

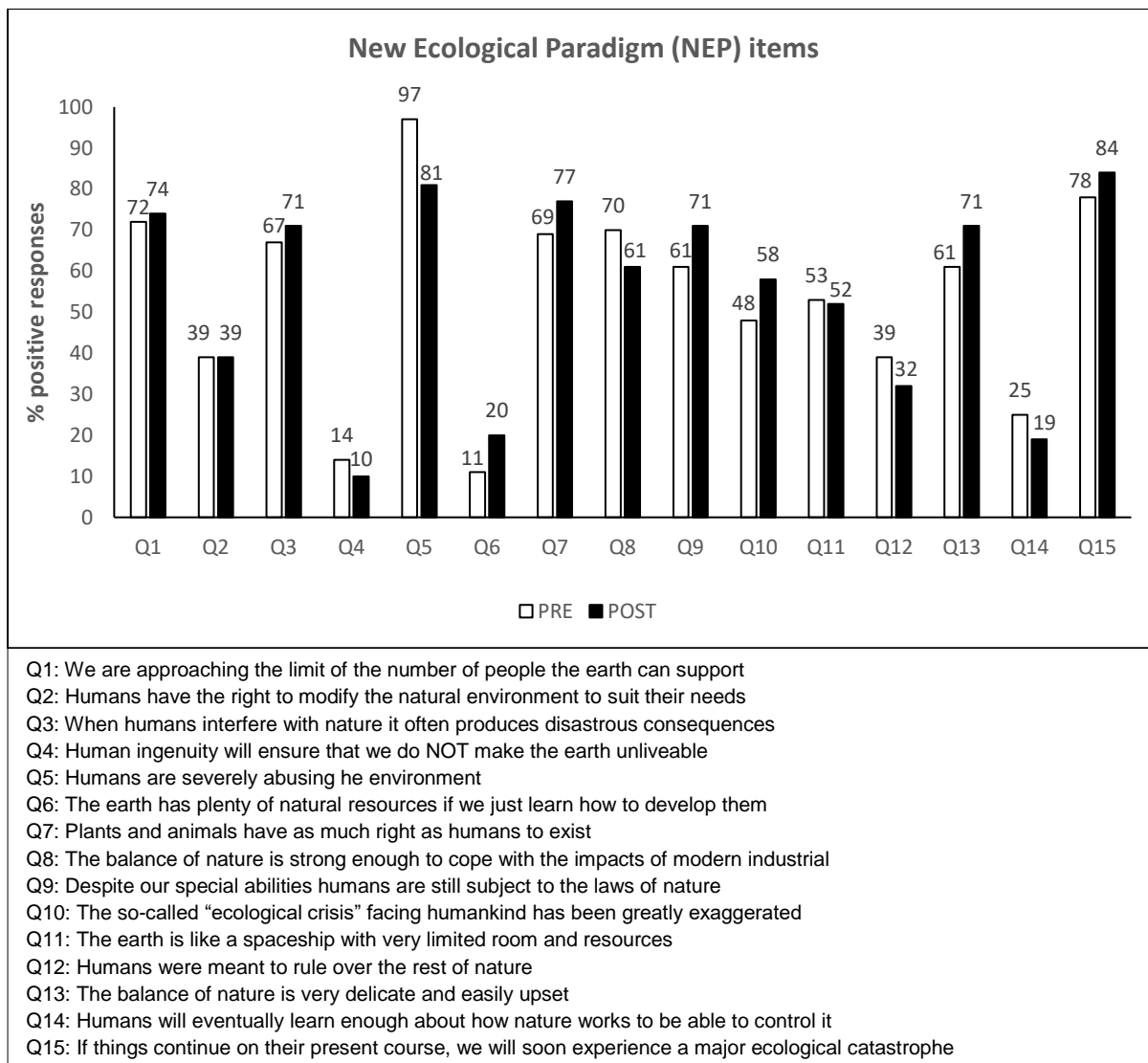


Figure 6: A bar graph to show the percentage of positive responses for the statements on New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale (Dunlap et al., 2000) (pre and post), n=36 (pre), 31 (post).

Figure 6 shows that, post-project, the young people in this sample were more positive about 8 out of the 15 items on the NEP scale. Their responses remained stable for one statement and they were less positive about 6 out of the 15 statements. The items which evidence the most positive shift in perceptions were “*Despite our special abilities humans are still subject to the laws of nature*”, “*The so-called “ecological crisis” facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated*” and “*The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset*” – each of these items evidenced a 10% increase in positive responses. The statement that evidenced the biggest decline in positive responses in the post project questionnaire was “*Humans are severely abusing he environment*” – there was a 16% decrease in positive responses to this statement.

In the focus groups, the young people who took part were asked what they see as the key environmental issues and threats to the environment at the minute and in the future. The most frequently mentioned issues were comments related to “*people*”, carbon emissions, “*climate change*”, “*rubbish/litter*” and, to a lesser extent, farming practices and the dangers posed by “*big companies*” and consumerism.

References to “people” were talked about in three focus groups, and focused on how people do not care or are not interested:

I also think, probably like, just no interest in their environment for young folk, it seems to be as well – it’s like they need to be made aware. [DofE volunteering group]

Well, there’s a lot of people that don’t appreciate it a lot. There are a lot of people living on the planet but maybe just not enough appreciate it and they don’t really care and they just don’t think it affects them. [DofE volunteering group]

Nobody really cares nowadays about anything. Like as long as they get things handed to them they’re happy, as long as they don’t have to do nothing. Like nobody wants to go out and participate very much nowadays. [DofE residential]

Yeah, because a lot of people just sort of don’t really care, or they care and they don’t do anything. [Youth Forum]

I think us, not maybe us as a group, but like I think humans are still a threat to the environment, because we are the ones that are causing the problem [Youth Forum]

Carbon emissions were mainly talked about in relation to overuse of vehicles coupled with a lack of public transport as well as the production and transport of food. This was discussed in five of the focus groups:

Carbon emissions....because just more and more people are just driving about and they’re not like thinking about it. Like they could probably cycle to work or walk to work. [DofE residential]

But the fact that public transport is pretty shocking here, there’s no choice for people really if they want to have a reliable way of getting about the place, you can drive or risk not getting there or whatever. [DofE residential]

Probably the amount of power or the amount of omissions and things we’re creating too with everybody, you know, driving so many vehicles in places and pollution. [Young Farmers]

I think another thing that results, there’s just so many things that tie into other things like public transport, even if it’s just car parks being built, all of that ties in, and but they won’t seem to realise that. [Youth Forum]

Cars – cars are bad for the environment as well. [EA group]

Yeah, because like humans have had like, a 100, 200 plus increase in the amount of meat we eat, like we eat so much more meat these days and it’s not necessary, like you can eat meat twice a week and that would drastically reduce the amount that’s needed. [Youth Forum]

Interestingly, views around veganism and eating meat differed between some groups, those young people who represented Young Farmers associations talked at length about how meat eating is ‘misrepresented’, often in the media, that farmers do not get to have their say and

that there is a misunderstanding. A few young people in other groups acknowledged the misunderstanding too:

Cows, COVID-19 and pollution, they say, "That's your cows, that's your issue," so when we took all the planes and everything away and there's still the same amount of cows pollution has dropped but there's still the number of cows. Yeah, it's... For us I feel it's the media which is the same as anything, the media is controlling the world now. I don't know what farmers have done on the media but it seems to be... anything that farmers do, it's a bad thing. [Young Farmers]

There's also misinformation with meat...because if you're going buy vegetables and stuff that come from Spain rather than supporting local produce... in-growing is kind of the best like way to go about it. [Youth Forum]

Climate change was discussed by three groups, but this was in a very general way:

Climate change probably... The biggest one you hear about all the time. [DofE volunteering group]

Climate change is undeniably the biggest problem we're facing. [DofE residential]

It's there, the sea as well. And that's releasing all that CO2 in the atmosphere which contributes to the climate change, which is obviously another big issue. [Youth Forum]

In three of the focus groups, issues around rubbish/litter, to include 'fly-tipping', was discussed. This tended to focus on local issues:

Well, everyone plays a part in it but I don't think people realise what to do or how that one wee bit of litter could affect, it all adds up. [DofE residential]

I really think litter is one, especially in the countryside because I remember growing up like there never used to be hardly any litter down our road because we live pretty rural here but every year you just see it more and more and fly tipping and things like that, it has become a real problem out in the rural area, people throw bags of stuff out their windows and not even one or two pieces of rubbish it's sometimes full bin liners, so big large items. [Young Farmers]

Rubbish.... Yeah, litterbugs. [EA group]

Three groups also talked about the dangers posed by "big companies" and two groups talked about consumerism:

Yeah, and the companies, massive, massive companies... they're probably not held as accountable, like, for what they do, they can get away with it just because of who they are. [DofE volunteering group]

Negligence being a massive one, sort of big companies. A lot afford to go, "Oh it's a big company, there's nothing I can do in a small-term thing," when there is. I think awareness is kind of a big issue on that. [DofE residential]

Yeah, big corporations that just pollute the air and stuff, and the water, and cutting down trees like the Amazon rainforest and all, and destroying habitats for animals.[EA group]

I think even stronger than that, you know, people don't even realise they're affecting sometimes, because even if it doesn't have much packaging or anything, you don't know where it came from. A lot of the time people won't know enough to, "Oh that's bad," not to get it, they'll think, "Oh that hasn't got much packaging," and buy it. I think a big... a massive issue is awareness of what you're buying and all that.

Yeah, consumer ways.[Youth Forum]

Farming practices were also talked about by three groups – views were mixed here which mirrored the backgrounds of the young people involved. Many acknowledged the impact of farming practices but those from Young Farmers groups talked about the financial impact of environmentally friendly farming and the harsh reality of running a farm:

A lot of famers engage in very harmful practices and not a lot of them do it simply because, the fact that there was a farm close by and they were burning plastics and stuff. [DofE residential]

Farmers are losing money every year, they're just trying to get enough to keep going, keep the families going, so if it's an extra cost then farmers won't want to do it. [DofE residential]

Like the farmers are the biggest ones work the land and are in the farm planting forests and all that, and if it can't work for them then what's the point of trying to save the environment if the farmers – if you aren't working with the farmers and they're the ones using the land. [DofE residential]

groups are getting involved against like factory farming and stuff which produce so much CO2 and gases, and none of that's actually being taken out by that if it's a imbalance. [Youth Forum]

Other issues were talked about, but less frequently and in fewer focus groups. These included deforestation (two groups), single use plastics (two groups), water pollution (two groups) and endangered species (one group).

It is important to note that one group in particular, the Youth Forum, cited most of the issues discussed above but were also the only group who talked about a variety of other issues to include: loss of "wild places", political inaction and a lack of connection to nature.

4.2 How young people want to be involved in key environmental issues and their role in creating change and making a difference

During the focus groups, the young people were asked about the mechanisms which currently exist for getting involved in environmental issues, as well as how they would like to be involved. As reported in section 3.2., the majority said that current mechanisms were very limited and referenced a narrow range of opportunities to include "school", "scouts" and a few community based projects. The most frequently mentioned mechanism was "Grassroots Challenge".

Similarly, when asked about how they would like to get involved, the majority of responses referenced “Grassroots Challenge” activities or activities similar to these. In fact, participants in six out of the seven focus groups mentioned “Grassroots Challenge” activities or activities similar to these:

Yeah, I'd do more of that if there was more. [DofE volunteering group]

I think they should be supporting them, the likes of that Mourne, you know, Mourne Heritage that's doing that, they should get you know – places like that there should get more funding to do more days of that, if they would do more there, do a couple of days a week with different groups or encourage more and then that in turn might, they might say to their parents and their parents might, when they're retired say I wouldn't mind doing a bit of that and then it's helping all the trails up there that everything is being better done or I don't really know what for anybody else. [DofE residential].

But when I went to the Grassroots Challenge residential for the first time, we did like conservation work every single day and it was amazing, and I loved it, and I was like, “Why isn't this available everywhere?” [Youth Forum]

Yeah, I think if they get the initial kind of interest again through, you know, projects like Grassroots, as you say you ignite something there and they realise as they get older, hopefully that is their other responsibility. So I mean I actually enjoy kind of my main thing they keep there's a lot of quality in everything that we do for Grassroots. [SEN teacher]

I think that organisation like Grassroots are very good, because they have the bit of knowledge, it's not some random person coming along and trying to start talking about it, they're an actual organisation with that and that's their role...that's a full time job for them whereas we're meeting maybe once a fortnight doing different activities so it's hard for us to maybe have as much focus and as good an insight whereas they're doing research and continual projects and have the facts and figures and know and have the resources to put it into action, definitely something like that has helped us, we wouldn't have had any of this stuff of it wasn't for Grassroots coming and pushing us on and giving you that incentive to complete to activities [Young Farmers]

Two groups talked about how young people should have more of a say in environmental issues and two groups talked about the importance of motivating people:

I suppose just having more of a say in things in – yeah... Well, being able to like vote would be nice, from a slightly younger age.

Yeah, I feel that's the biggest thing that would make a difference. [DofE volunteering group]

I think we're already making a difference, and that should... really the higher-levels up in governments and organisations are paying a lot more attention to young people, for example like Ulster Wildlife, the AGM invited me and another person on the Youth Forum to speak about our experiences and about the impact that young people are having, and why money should be put towards activities that involve

young people. There's other environmental organisations like Friends For The Earth that now have young people on its Board of Trustees, like directly putting their voices into those organisations to make changes that benefit young people and the environment. [Youth Forum]

Yeah, it's all about motivation because young people don't have no motivation. If it's not sitting in a warm room in front of a computer or on their phone, they don't want to do it so like getting people up there, getting a few interested and then trying to get them few interested to inspire the other ones. [DofE residential]

Several other suggestions were made by young people across the groups, however, there was no general consensus beyond the need for more "Grassroots Challenge" activities or activities similar to these. Other suggestions included: litter picking (one group), recycling (one group), health eating (one group), green jobs, (one group), car sharing (one group) and general volunteering (one group).

4.3 The support young people would like to help them to take action for the environment

During the focus groups, each group was asked about the support needed to enable young people to make a difference for the environment. Participants were also asked who this support should come from and what it should look like. The most prevalent theme, mentioned by participants in all seven focus groups, was the need to educate people. Several groups mentioned the importance of educating and motivating parents and older people in the community, many (five groups) thought the education should be through school with several (three groups) proposing that environmental education should be on the curriculum:

I think people's parents should be taught, like there's a lot of people that just haven't been taught that kind of thing or have and I'm sure a lot of people here have but there's maybe some people that just don't really care and then that carries on to their children and that kind of thing; it should be taught. [DofE volunteering group]

Better like educating people properly, and I know like from trying to organise, you know, even just like a litter pick or something, it's getting young people excited about it that, you know, when it's not actually as daunting as what it seems of going and picking up litter for a couple of hours actually can be fun. [Youth Forum]

Certainly within the school, you know, there's plenty of opportunities. Outside of school, I suppose they're sort of dependant on parental buy-in, with a lot of things you know it depends on how active they are in seeking those things out if it is something that the young people will want to get involved in. [SEN teacher]

someone reaching out to you and encouraging you to do it, so like the more you get like the more someone else encourages you to do it, like you'll start encouraging like other people to do it as well. [Young Farmers]

And also a lot of the older generation in the farming community sort of have a taboo thing around the environment as well and also don't realise what is out there now, so the young people can influence their fathers or their grandfathers as to what they can do. [Young Farmers]

Like, you go by schools and stuff, and, like, when you do, like, St Vincent de Paul stuff; like, you go around places and make people more aware of the damage that they're actually doing, because most people don't even realise what they're doing. [EA group]

Yeah, start nursery school and early primary school years. [DofE residential]

I think of that, what you specialise in, does that see a group with teaching outside the classroom, getting kids more involved with nature, and then it's a snowball effect from there, like the way they're interested in the environment, hopefully. Same whenever I was younger, if we'd have done outside work like that then that has always interested me. [Youth Forum]

I suppose yes, it's really a matter of just embedding it into part of their life, that it becomes their habit to do these things rather than a one-off event. I think that really is everybody's responsibility. Within our school I would say out of 18, there might have been three or four would have been fired up to actually make a difference at the end of it. [SEN teacher]

Every group mentioned that such support should come from some level of Government, to include local councils and authorities, with the majority of comments focused on some level of funding:

Then again it comes down to the way the government turn out their money to like certain places, like schools especially like the schools have no money for toilet roll and paper let alone taking bus trips of young people out up to the mountains to go and do volunteer path building, so that's extra money that's needed, so they're not going to do that so young people don't have a chance. I know when I arrived at school we went away out different trips here and there and now whenever my youngest brother was going through school there, he got very little. [DofE residential]

I think a lot of it comes down to funding from the governance aspect, because you need the funds for a lot of these initiatives...[Youth Forum]

it's also councils, you know, I think here that councils should maybe run things a bit more, especially the likes of our local parks like....the way they do some things maybe. I don't know, councils would be quite good, they sort of all make courses that environmental, yeah. [SEN teacher]

I don't know. Run programmes, like, that help pay for the cars, like benefits, and no tax and all the like. There's stuff like that there, for electric cars, so you'd make people want to bet, like. [EA group]

Councils could do more as well... paying people to come out and pick up more litter and all, as well. [EA group]

I would say like I think our government is a big area to support and to really get behind it and meet quite a large audience and if they were to do something to get either young people involved or to get more people involved and again incentives can help with that and I think that would be a bigger area where they could do with

more resources and support that way and they do have a large audience obviously and could have a lot of power to implement those type of things. [Young Farmers]

And also I believe that the funding for Grassroots is running out this year and I'm actually quite saddened it is running out because the past few years I've been with them or doing the activities and everything else I actually enjoyed it, but when Andrew broke the news that this year that they were going to run out of funding I was actually "Really?" and actually I'm quite saddened that it's running out [Young Famers].

In particular, those involved in Young Farmers Clubs talked about the need for more grants for farmers:

Yeah, some of those would have been one of the big environmental issues and I think with the likes of the one when we went to the biodiversity farm, it really helped show the things that can be implemented. For example, they had a hydro system put in place in an area of wasteland with, they changed it into planting for trees that they couldn't use anyway which then also helps reduce the pollution and also there was funding and grants for them to help them with that. So, whenever we went to the likes of things like that and what other people are doing, it really helps others to show what issues they have and what they can tackle themselves and the funding and stuff that's out there that can also help them to do that definitely I think was a big help. [Young Famers]

Well I suppose in a way it's like funding on farms, so if you were really to drive it home, you know, they need to be more invested in it and to buy in. Well, not to buy in but, you know, to support them in helping the environment. [Young Famers]

Also, easily, grants, if they were to go up to a farmer and say I'll give you a grant if you can plant a load of trees. They're happy to say yes. Because there's a girl down the road there from me, she got a grant and she has planted every corner of her field with trees. [Young Famers]

In five of the focus groups, participants talked about support and activity within community groups:

Well like within towns and stuff I think if they could get some sort of community projects that sort of gets everyone involved and sort of a good sense of community and everyone kind of working for the same aim, that would be pretty worthwhile. [DofE residential]

It should be the local groups who are in touch with you, there's like scouts or schools, or any group which is in contact with young people, it's their responsibility. [Youth Forum]

I don't think there's any one person or any one group as such, I'd say I think we all have the responsibility really. I think it starts from if we're talking about the Grassroots coming into schools then the next buyer into that is teachers, and maybe managers of teachers and then maybe, you know, a bit more flexible into the teaching of these sort of things. And then outside of that then you'd be able to get, you know, youth clubs or councils and different things involved, which is very vital as well. [SEN teacher]

For youth clubs as well. [EA group]

Participants in three groups talked about the importance of motivating and inspiring or influencing people:

Yeah, it's all about motivation because young people don't have no motivation. If it's not sitting in a warm room in front of a computer or on their phone, they don't want to do it so like getting people up there, getting a few interested and then trying to get them few interested to inspire the other ones. [DofE residential]

it's getting young people excited about it that, you know, when it's not actually as daunting as what it seems of going and picking up litter for a couple of hours actually can be fun. And just from like holding them sort of events across the community, once they do it, they have a great time, but it's just that initial push to get people to do it, and it's nearly like it's not cool to help the environment. And I know there's a big, especially on social media and stuff like that it's a big driver, it's like all the camp are saying, "How about it, a litter pick, or planting a hedge," [Youth Forum]

I would say trying to get them encouraged because for the likes of Young Farmers when you come on the committee you don't want to plunge them all in the deep end so you lure them in a wee bit and then lure them in another bit and then get them in as well. You just don't want to go on, like when you bring them onto the Grassroots or any other things, you don't want to lure them in too much going, "Oh I don't like it, so there you are," but if you just lure them in a wee bit, lure them in a wee bit, that's you. [Young Farmers]

Several other suggestions were given in relation to the support required. However, these were mentioned by individuals and there was no general consensus in the remainder of the responses. These included: putting out more positive messages about environmental actions, taking part in things which make you think, the provision of more charging points for electric cars, investment in public transport, the provision of more bins. In addition, two groups talked about general support from the leadership within their organisations (schools for the SEN teachers; Young Farmers committee for those involved in the Young Farmers Clubs).

Evaluation of Grassroots Challenge Project activities

In the focus groups, the young people and the teachers were asked several questions designed to encourage them to reflect on and evaluate their experience of the Grassroots Challenge Project. In particular, this section will include data from the following questions: 'Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement with the Grassroots Challenge Project?, What did you enjoy the most/least about your involvement in the Grassroots Challenge Project? Why?'

Five of the groups talked generally about how enjoyable, useful and/or "fun" the activities were:

Yeah, it was interesting and good craic as well. [DofE residential]

The residential, really fun. It's two, three, four days where you just go in there and you're getting hands-on with nature, you're doing woodwork, making barn owl boxes, squirrel feeders, bird boxes, planting saplings, weeding, and you're also learning a lot. They bring in experts, you learn about red squirrels and barn owls and it's really, really... a really, really good way to get young people involved and educated, and they also really enjoy it. That's how a lot of us started, we went to this residential and found it really fun, and the opportunity there to join the Youth Forum afterwards. [Youth Forum]

Yeah, I think I would say something on the programme from start to finish. It was fantastic. That's certainly where my skills don't lie. I've... not a massive interest in Ulster Wildlife, and things that I must be honest from the outset. But I found myself enthralled by the whole thing, and as did my classroom assistant, and the children equally.... But it was fantastic just to leave all that and I had the pleasure to see the kids with smiles on their faces and half the time I was walking round taking pictures of it all going on, to be able to send home to the parents, and the parents loved seeing what was going on in the classroom. [SEN teacher]

It was absolutely perfect as far as I was concerned, it was brilliant. [SEN teacher]

I think the best part really about taking part in it all was it sort of seemed difficult at the start, we thought this was going to be quite hard to integrate in to the club but it really was just small changes and building on those small changes which made it easier throughout it all and how little things that you can do can make an impact and can make a change and how easy those little things could be I think was – because we all thought this is going to be difficult. [Young Farmers]

You were never really bored, like. You always had something to do, so there was nothing like you would be like, "Oh, this isn't enjoyable," [EA group]

A huge variety of specific activities were mentioned as the 'most' enjoyable and these differed between groups and individuals. This may, in part be due to the variety of activities planned from the outset, for different groups. However, three groups talked about "making" things from wood and two groups specifically mentioned sessions related to Red Squirrels. Other activities mentioned (once or twice in the same group/individual) included: a session on bees, bird watching, animals being brought into school, canoeing, the celebration event, a clean up, clearing invasive species, hedge cutting, path building, planning, a residential, looking for tadpoles, wildflower work and the Youth Forum meeting (to include one reference to how good it is to set their own agenda).

When asked why they found the activities enjoyable or useful, four groups complimented, several times in each focus group, the Grassroots Challenge Project staff:

I think at this point to, it would give me, wee gratitude to the grant through [Ulster Wildlife staff member's name] and also of Ulster Wildlife people that have put so much energy into the programme, and you know, personally I got so much out of it, so just a big thank you. [SEN teacher]

because we all thought this is going to be difficult, this is going to be hard to do but definitely the help from the Grass Roots Team and that were very helpful and creative ideas and it was fun in the end and I think a lot of people thought it would be boring but from all the activities they've been able to do, they've activities we probably never would participate in or make ourselves do so that really would have been probably the best thing about it. [Young Farmers]

Yeah, definitely I would say their support was great and the resources that you needed or any ideas, maybe you had a small idea and they were able to make it tie in to what you can do with the environment.... So, just some things like that and their experience to be able to help us tie that in and make it in to a programme and it was very helpful and all the resources that they gave us and even just coming along to the activities and just adding any extra information, like we went for a walk in the forest and they went through things that you would never have noticed before, they were pointing it out you know which was brilliant. [Young Farmers]

like just like we said, like [Ulster Wildlife staff member's name] who was usually – was working with us, she was amazing when it came to anything organisation-wise and even when we were there like she loved it and you could really tell how passionate she was about it which made it more, I don't know, exciting. I don't know if there's anything else, just that like [Ulster Wildlife staff member's name] herself was amazing, do you know? [Young Farmers]

Aye, and you always had help when you needed it as well, do you know what I mean? So, like, if you needed him, you'd just tell him through there, and he'd be like, "Ah, let me help you out here". [EA group]

Several other reasons were given, across the groups, as to why the activities were enjoyable and/or useful. The most frequently cited reason was "learning" (five groups) followed by community recognition (three groups) and improved mental health (three groups). A sample of these comments are outlined below:

learning about the different things, like we learned about, like specifically about red squirrels this week. [DofE residential]

...and then he was amazing learning about, you know, the habitat and, you know, the impact of plain farming and... there's just so much learning there. [SEN teacher]

Well I suppose getting the club together to like work towards something at the end of it and being educated at the same time. [Young Farmers]

Probably for me being involved in the community clean up one because there was one that was recognised on the [community website name] page and a lot of positive comments, people appreciated it and recognised that we were going out of our way to do something for the community so I think that was probably one of the ones that was best for me because it was kind of worthwhile doing it because there was something in return for it, you know because it gives the club a good name and you're doing well for the environment as well [Young Farmers]

Well, like, it helps the community, wherever we're doing it, and it looks good on the CV. [EA group]

But since I've been involved, I've like realised that there is a lot out there and that I'm totally capable of achieving it, and that's been really the reason for like my self-confidence and my mental health and all that. [Youth Forum]

I thought they all were fairly helpful, so they were. Definitely the litter one you see yourselves the difference you're making and then the wellness walk was definitely – walking in a forest is definitely a great way to you know get a breath of fresh air and clear your mind a bit and you're looking at your phone or looking at your screen or anything like that, you're getting away from it all and those sort of things. I definitely felt they were worthwhile activities. [Young Farmers]

Other reasons included increased confidence (two groups), that they were something different to be involved in (two groups), the resources were good (two groups), they helped participants feel that they were making an impact (two groups). Some groups also talked about how the project/activities were an opportunity to meet new people (two groups) and work with others (two groups). Finally, each of the following reasons were mentioned by one group/individual: being outdoors, changed their perception of Ulster Wildlife, good communication with staff, CV/qualifications, a chance to get away from the farm, hands on conservation, good links to the John Muir programme, that there are not many opportunities like this, it was pitched at a suitable level, there was something for everybody, and the good weekly planning.

When asked what they enjoyed the least and why, the majority of focus groups participants responded by saying “nothing” or that all of the activities were good/fun/enjoyable. Only two groups cited specific issues – the SEN teachers felt that the activity evaluations were not appropriate and a few of the young people on the residential felt there was too much information. A few people in the Youth Forum felt that some of the locations for activities were too hard to get to, but this was linked to the overall issue around a lack of opportunities to get involved in environmental activities in Northern Ireland, which was cited in several sections of this report.

Key findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Key findings

This report presents findings from an evaluation of Ulster Wildlife's Grassroots Challenge Project, together with young people's views, opinions and concerns about environmental issues and actions, which will be used to inform future work. The project has been running since 2015 and this evaluation presents evidence from activities conducted between September 2019 and March 2020. The evaluation comprised pre and post activity questionnaire and focus groups. A total of 36 young people completed the pre-project questionnaire and 31 young people completed the post-project questionnaire. In total, 30 young people and 5 teachers (in Special Schools) took part in the focus groups. A summary of the key findings is outlined below, in line with the evaluation statements and the views, opinions and concerns gathered from young people, to inform future work.

Evaluation statements

- *I feel connected to nature and wildlife*
 - The young people who completed the questionnaires rated their connectedness to nature as higher after taking part in Grassroots Challenge Project activities.
- *I want to make a difference for nature and wildlife*
 - More of the young people who completed the questionnaires said they would now take part in environmental/nature/wildlife actions as a result of completing their Grassroots Challenge Project activities. For the most part, these young people said this was because they have enjoyed these types of activities and have a better understanding of the importance of such actions/helping the environment.
 - During the focus groups, the majority of young people said they want to make a difference for nature but cited a lack of opportunities and/or the promotion of existing ones as a major issue. Many of the young people also explained that there should be more opportunities, publicised using a greater variety of mediums.
- *I feel I can make a difference for nature and wildlife*
 - The young people who took part in the 2019-20 Grassroots Challenge Project rated their overall Leadership Competence as a little higher at the end of the project but they rated their perceptions of their ability to influence environmental policy decisions as much higher at the end of the project.
 - In the focus groups, responses were mixed in relation to questions around whether or not young people can make a difference for nature and cited a lack of opportunity as well as a general limited awareness of environmental issues among young people, that many do not care and that there is a stigma around being involved in environmental issues.

- They were positive about the Grassroots Challenge Project and would like to do more of this. Those representing Young Farmers Clubs would like the Project to be tailored for their group.
- *Making a difference for nature and wildlife also makes a difference for me*
 - The young people in this sample were more positive about all but one of the 30 statements related to the benefits for young people when they help nature, after taking part in the Grassroots Challenge Project.

Young people's views, opinions and concerns

- *The threats and opportunities around key environmental issues such as climate change, plastic pollution and biodiversity loss*
 - Post-project, the young people in this sample were more positive about 8 out of the 15 items on the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale. Their responses remained stable for one statement and they were less positive about 6 out of the 15 statements.
 - In the focus groups, the young people who took part were asked what they see as the key environmental issues and threats to the environment at the minute and in the future. The most frequently mentioned issues were comments related to “*people*” (do not care or are not interested), carbon emissions (overuse of vehicles, lack of public transport, production and transport of food), “*climate change*” (generally), “*rubbish/litter*” (locally) and, to a lesser extent, farming practices and the dangers posed by “*big companies*” and consumerism.
 - Discussions around farming practices were mixed and mirrored the backgrounds of the young people involved, for example, Young Farmers groups talked about the financial impact of environmentally friendly farming and the harsh reality of running a farm.
 - One group in particular, the Youth Forum, cited a greater number and variety of issues and threats to environment, in comparison to other groups.
- *How they want to be involved in key environmental issues and how they see their role in creating change and making a difference*
 - In the focus groups, when asked about how they would like to get involved, the majority of responses referenced “Grassroots Challenge” activities or activities similar to these.
 - Several other suggestions were made by young people across the groups, however, there was no general consensus beyond the need for more “Grassroots Challenge” activities or activities similar to these.
- *The support they would like to help them to take action for the environment*
 - The most prevalent theme, mentioned by participants in all seven focus groups, was the need to educate people to include parents and older people in the community as well as through schools and the curriculum.
 - Every group mentioned that such support should come from some level of Government, to include local councils and authorities, with the majority of comments focused on some level of funding. In particular, those involved in Young Farmers Clubs talked about the need for more grants for farmers. In five of the focus groups, participants talked about support and activity within

community groups and three groups talked about the importance of motivating and inspiring or influencing people:

When asked several questions aimed at encouraging the participants to reflect on and evaluate the Grassroots Challenge Project, they were very positive. The majority of focus groups talked about how enjoyable, useful and/or “fun” the activities were. A huge variety of specific activities were mentioned as the ‘most’ enjoyable and these differed between groups and individuals. When asked why they found the activities enjoyable or useful, four groups complimented, several times in each focus group, the Grassroots Challenge Project staff.

Several other reasons were given, across the groups, as to why the activities were enjoyable and/or useful. “Learning”, community recognition and improved mental health were the most frequently mentioned reasons.

6.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

This report presents evidence that the Grassroots Challenge Project benefits the young people involved across all the evaluation statements, which represent the aims of the project. The young people who took part rated their connectness to nature as higher at the end of the project activities, more of them said they would now take part in environmental/nature/wildlife actions. They rated their overall Leadership Competence as a little higher at the end of the project but they rated their perceptions of their ability to influence environmental policy decisions as much higher at the end of the project. They also recognised that making a difference for nature makes a difference for them.

It can be concluded that whilst most of the participants involved in the focus groups would like to be involved in making a difference for nature, there is a very clear message that there are not enough opportunities nor mechanisms to do so. They are aware of issues and threats to the environment but these are limited, understood in a very general sense and are often focused on local concerns.

The young people involved in this research were very positive in their evaluation of the Grassroots Challenge Project – in relation to the activities, the benefits of these and the staff involved. They would like to see more Grassroots Challenge type projects and activities and propose that “support” should come from Government and local authorities to include funding and education initiatives.

Whilst the responses on the questionnaires and from the focus groups are from a small group of young people and may not be entirely representative, it is important to note that these young people signed up for and were involved in the Grassroots Challenge Project and may be more positive overall. Therefore, there is much work to be done in relation to perceptions and opinions around making a difference for wildlife. The young people involved in this research have offered some very real and tangible suggestions for those who work in the area in relation to increasing opportunities to get involved in environmental issues and how these should be promoted.

Given the evidence presented here, the following recommendations for Grassroots Challenge Project and key stakeholders should be considered:

- That the Project continues to be delivered in its current model to as many groups as possible, so many more young people can benefit. Ulster Wildlife might want to consider some new developments to further meet the specific needs of Young Farmers Clubs.
- The evaluation demonstrates a good proof of concept for the benefits of making young people aware of environmental issues and how they can make a difference. In particular. More explicit education around how to go about this, coupled with more opportunities at a local level would be recommended. Therefore, the ideal would be a 'scaling up' of the Project throughout the Council areas of Northern Ireland. Ulster Wildlife and other stakeholders should carefully consider how such opportunities are promoted and publicised for an audience of young people.
- Of all the groups involved in the focus groups, the Youth Forum were the most knowledgeable and empowered – replication of such work with young people is highly recommended.
- The evidence with such a small sample is positive so it is recommended that the sharing of best practice be throughout the UK and Ireland.
- The Project can also be presented as best practice to an international audience.

Given that this evaluation of the Grassroots Challenge Project was impacted by the restrictions around the Covid-19 lockdown, the following recommendations for future research should also be considered:

- It is also recommended that if the Grassroots Challenge Project is replicated, it should be evaluated with a higher number of young people involved and in other areas throughout Northern Ireland and beyond for the purposes of comparison beyond a limited sample.
- Given that the Project already exists as a well-defined learning package, it would be ideal for further in-depth evaluation, such as a trial (with a control group) and a process evaluation. Ideally, this would go hand in hand with a 'scaling up' of the Project.

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Appendix 1

An overview of the analysed questions/scales from the pre and post-project questionnaires

Questions/Scale (if applicable)	Response options/response groups
Background factors	
How old are you? Please write your age on the line below:	<i>Open response</i>
Please indicate your gender, with a tick, from the choices outlined below:	Male Female Prefer not to say Other. If other, please state:
What is the name of your school?	<i>Open response</i>
What organisation are you working with for the Grassroots Challenge Project? (please tick one answer):	Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award residential My school Mount Steward Duke of Edinburgh's Volunteering Group Allotment Duke of Edinburgh's Volunteering Group Banbridge Duke of Edinburgh's Volunteering Group Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster Eco Club The Grassroots Challenge Youth Forum Other. If other, please state:
Previous involvement in environmental/nature/wildlife actions (pre-project questionnaire)	
Have you been involved in environmental/nature/wildlife actions in the past? (please tick one answer)	Yes No Don't know
If yes, what were they?	<i>Open response</i>
If no, why not?	<i>Open response</i>
Future involvement in environmental/nature/wildlife actions (post-project questionnaire)	
Now that you have completed your Grassroots Challenge Project activity, do you think you would get involved in environmental/nature/wildlife actions in the future? (please tick one answer)	Yes No Don't know
If yes, why would you now get involved?	<i>Open response</i>
If no, why would you not get involved?	<i>Open response</i>
Connectedness to Nature scale (Mayer and Frantz, 2004)	
I often feel a sense of oneness with the natural world around me.	Strongly disagree Disagree
I think of the natural world as a community to which I belong.	Neutral
I recognize and appreciate the intelligence of other living organisms.	Agree
I often feel disconnected from nature.	Strongly agree

When I think of my life, I imagine myself to be part of a larger cyclical process of living.	
I often feel a kinship with animals and plants.	
I feel as though I belong to the Earth as equally as it belongs to me.	
I have a deep understanding of how my actions affect the natural world.	
I often feel part of the web of life.	
I feel that all inhabitants of Earth, human, and nonhuman, share a common 'life force'.	
Like a tree can be part of a forest, I feel embedded within the broader natural world.	
When I think of my place on Earth, I consider myself to be a top member of a hierarchy that exists in nature.	
I often feel like I am only a small part of the natural world around me, and that I am no more important than the grass on the ground or the birds in the trees.	
My personal welfare is independent of the welfare of the natural world.	
Adapted Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) (Peterson et al., 2000)	
Leadership Competence subscale	
I am often a leader in groups	Strongly disagree
I would prefer to be a leader rather than a follower	Disagree
I would rather have a leadership role when I'm involved in a group project	Neutral
	Agree
	Strongly agree
I can usually organize people to get things done	
Other people usually follow my ideas	
I find it very easy to talk in front of a group	
I like to work on solving a problem myself rather than wait and see if someone else will deal with it	
I like trying new things that are challenging to me	
Policy Control subscale	
I enjoy participation because I want to have as much say in environmental issues as possible <i>(original question: I enjoy participation because I want to have as much say in my community or school as possible)</i>	
Youth like me can really understand what's going on with the environment <i>(original question: Youth like me can really understand what's going on with my community or school)</i>	
I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the important environmental issues which confront us <i>(original question: I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues which confront my community or school)</i>	
Youth like me have the ability to participate effectively in environmental activities and decision making <i>(original question: Youth like me have the ability to participate effectively in community or school activities and decision making)</i>	
My opinion is important because it could someday make a difference to our environment <i>(original question: My opinion is important because it could someday make a difference in my community or school)</i>	

There are plenty of ways for youth like me to have a say in what we do in our environment

(original question: There are plenty of ways for youth like me to have a say in what our community or school does)

It is important to me that I actively participate in environmental issues

(original question: It is important to me that I actively participate in local teen issues)

Most environmental leaders would listen to me

(original question: Most community or school leaders would listen to me)

Many local activities are important to participate in

(original question: Many local activities are important to participate in)

The New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale (Dunlap et al., 2000)

We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support

Strongly disagree

Mildly disagree

Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs

Unsure

Mildly agree

When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences

Strongly agree

Human ingenuity will ensure that we do NOT make the earth unliveable

Humans are severely abusing the environment

The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them

Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist

The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial

Despite our special abilities humans are still subject to the laws of nature

The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated

The earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources

Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature

The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset

Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it

If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe

Benefits from helping nature

Being out in nature is good for mental health

Strongly disagree

Social skills and opportunities

Disagree

Purpose and focus

Neutral

Nature makes me feel happy, excited, inspired

Agree

Gain unique and useful skills

Strongly agree

Educates us about wildlife

Getting fresh air

Expand our knowledge

Love how it makes me feel

I like to know I have helped out

Saving our life support system

Team working

Doing practical things for wildlife makes you happy!

Imagination and enthusiasm

You feel a sense of satisfaction as you're helping to save the planet

Understanding the importance of our impact on nature

Vocational skills

To help clear the mind

Makes us more rounded as young people

Small changes = big difference

Allows us to learn about all the things that surround us

Learn by doing

Relieve stress from school and part-time jobs

Break from social media frenzy

Get something done!

Allows us to become aware of current issues that affect our world

You learn scientific methods

Gets you outside

Develop own sense of responsibility

Together we can!

Appendix 2

An outline of the focus group questions.

GENERAL QUESTIONS/OPENER:

- 1) Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement with the Grassroots Challenge Project?
- 2) What did you enjoy the most/least about your involvement in the Grassroots Challenge Project? Why?

VIEWS ON KEY ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:

- 3) What do you see as the key environmental issues at the minute? (PROMPTS: climate change, plastic pollution, biodiversity loss, clean air and clean water, lack of connectedness to nature, species extinction, habitat loss)
 - a. Why did you select these issues?
- 4) What are the threats to the environment at the minute?
 - a. In the future?
 - b. Why do you think that?
- 5) Do you think there are any opportunities with regard to these key environmental issues at the minute?
 - a. In the future?
 - b. Why do you think that?

INVOLVEMENT IN KEY ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:

- 6) Would you like to be involved in tackling these environmental issues?
 - a. If so, why?
 - b. Ideally, how would you like to be involved?
- 7) Would you like to be involved in making the most of the opportunities these environmental issues bring to the table?
 - a. If so, why?
 - b. If so, do you think there are opportunities available to you to get involved at present? What are they?
 - c. Do mechanisms exist for you to get involved?

MAKING A DIFFERENCE:

- 8) Do you think young people can make a difference in relation to key environmental issues?
 - a. Why? Why not?
 - b. How?
- 9) Do you think young people can create change with regard to these key environmental issues? What role should/could they play?
 - a. Why? Why not?
 - b. How?

SUPPORT:

- 10) What support do you think you need to enable you to make a difference for the environment?
 - a. Who do you think this support should come from?
 - b. What should it look like?

SUMMING UP:

- 11) Is there anything else you want to say?
- 12) Do you have any questions for me before we finish?

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