



Teens and Teachers take on Climate Education



Tide~ Elephant Times

Special Issue on Cardiff Conference

ET 4.1 October 2023



Teens and Teachers take on Climate Education

Bassaleg School student conference organisers, Karina, Aliya and Oliver
with their teacher Lucy Kirkham and speakers -
Tom Bullough, Katie Riley and Rhiannon Hawkins.

Elephant Times magazine is a Tide~ initiative.
www.tidegloballearning.net

It is edited by Jeff Serf & Scott Sinclair
We have taken on this voluntary role as Tide~ Trustees.
Lucy Kirkham has joined the team for this issue.

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I'm in Year 12, almost finished education yet this was the
first climate conference I've attended.

It's made me extremely optimistic about the future
because this conference has shown me student voice
counts and young people want to make a difference.

Lewys Roberts [Ysgol Bro Preseli] - speaking at the end of the event.

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Diolch ...

The conference resulted from the collaboration of many different organisations and people – thank you to everyone who made the day possible.

Special mention must go to staff and pupils from Bassaleg School and other participating schools: Eastern High, King Henry VIII, Ysgol Gyfun Gwent Is Coed, The Bishop of Llandaff, Howell's, Westbourne, Blessed Carlo Acutis, Plasmawr, St Martin's, Ysgol Bro Preseli, Morriston, and Fitzalan.

Thank you to Tide~ for planting the seed of the conference and this Elephant Times, our speakers for generously giving their time and expertise to the conference, and to those that have written articles in this magazine.

Also to the Compassionate Education Foundation for financial sponsorship and to Professor Peter Mackie and his colleagues at Cardiff University's School of Geography and Planning for their great support throughout the whole process.

Lucy Kirkham, Bassaleg School



Welcome to ET 4.1

Elephant Times [ET] magazine offers space for dialogue about global realities among education professionals.

This is a **special issue about a conference**, set up by Bassaleg School and hosted by Cardiff University. It brought students and teachers together from a variety of schools, to work on climate education.

This magazine is a follow up to the event and the ideas it generated.

This is the first in the fourth cycle of ET magazines. Please visit [Tide~ ET website](#) to view earlier editions.

Work over the last year has focused on the **educational implications of the climate crisis.**

The challenge now is to stimulate new work about those implications, in the education community and organisations engaged with climate change issues.

We emphasise the professional implications for teachers, the value of students and teachers working together, and the need for student entitlement.

This magazine aims to contribute to that process.

How can we recognise and build young people's skills to navigate the multi-dimensional climate emergency?



Lucy Kirkham and Rhiannon Hawkins introduce the thinking behind the conference at a Welsh Parliament event set up by Teach the Future [Wales].

See page 26

Secondary Schools' Conference
Glamorgan Building, Cardiff University
Thursday 29 June 2023

Teens & Teachers Take on Climate Education

Inspired by conversations between young people and educators, Bassaleg School is working in partnership with Tide~ and Cardiff University to provide a **stimulating and liberating space for older students (Y10 & Y12) and teachers to jointly explore climate education provision.**

We aim to involve up to 120 teacher and student delegates from 20 schools.

Our key question is:
How can we recognise and build young people's skills to navigate the multi-dimensional climate emergency?

A **pre-conference activity** and follow-up **autumn event** will support delegates to apply ideas from the conference to their own setting.

Recommendations from this conference will inform practitioners, policy-makers and politicians in Wales and beyond.

This conference is a pilot for **dialogue events** for young people and their teachers across the UK.

The conference is free, thanks to sponsorship from The Foundation for Compassionate Education (CoEd) and the work of partnership organisations.

YSGOL BASSALEG SCHOOL

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

THE COED FOUNDATION

Tide~
Connecting Dialogues

The conference - an overview

Girija Deshmukh

Thursday June 29th, 2023 is a date I will remember fondly. My first impression of the event, as we stood at the registration desk loaded with welcome packs, name badges, and notes, was how enthusiastic everyone appeared. The upbeat atmosphere made me feel welcome and relieved that I wasn't the only one looking forward to facilitating at the conference. The energy carried over into the welcome address and our day's activities.

Over 100 Year 10 and Year 12 students, from thirteen schools in South Wales, participated in the conference. In my opinion **Teens and Teachers take on Climate Education** was a milestone conference which provided a forum for 'Connecting dialogues' amongst young climate activists, students, teachers, facilitators and observers. Katie Riley, a young climate activist, provided an inspiring opening by discussing social justice, climate justice and communicating about how young people are feeling about the climate emergency. Her passion towards creating a transformative change from voiceless, helpless situations to vocalizing for change was amazing.



An engineer based in Scotland, Jacqui Murray's opinions on technology, cooperation, and specialising in a certain sector rather than "climbing the entire mountain" were incredible. Followed by a climate justice advocate, Rhiannon Hawkins' Eco Distress thoughts revealed a totally different view on climate change and mental health. Lina Yassin, another inspiring climate fighter, inspired me with her activism and efforts to help the vulnerable.

Writer Tom Bullough offered some illuminating insights into the climate and ecological emergency, and how literature is an excellent vehicle for communicating about it. He quoted, **"If you're not writing about climate, it's all fiction,"** which both encouraged and challenged me.

I learnt so much about an issue from so many various perspectives, beginning with young climate campaigners, moving on to writers, industrialists, and, in Jacqui Murray's words, *"climate change fixers."*

As a facilitator, I engaged and discussed with the delegates regarding their take on climate education and how they would like to make an addition in the curriculum, which was indeed the most amazing part.

Through a series of workshops, the students put forth their opinions by answering three main questions ...

- ❑ *What should be taught in schools?*
- ❑ *How should it be taught?*
- ❑ *When should it be taught?*

Students offered a range of reflections for example:

“I want to learn about climate education in an outdoor setting and by going on field trips”

“It is important that we do not overwhelm the primary school students ~ but start with a positive approach”

“I want to learn about the future career paths that we can take”

It was stimulating to see that the young students were aware of the climate emergency, are committed to addressing it in a good manner, whilst needing solid assistance and leadership.

Throughout the workshop sessions, I realised how vital and empowering the student discussions were. It was truly a student led conference.



A special acknowledgment to Lucy Kirkham, Abi Chase and the team of Bassaleg School for brilliantly defining and successfully organising this astounding conference which remarkably helped the students to reflect their opinions out loud.

I walked into the conference as a facilitator and the young ignited minds made sure that I walked out as a motivated and an inspired learner!

I am certain that the reflections of students will aid in the development of a climate education curriculum and provide fuel for future positive change. I'm pleased to have participated in a fruitful collaborating session.

I am sure that these young voices will become the 'Spirals of Change'.

Girija is a Postgraduate student at the School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, studying Urban and Regional Development. “Working for the community and ultimately for the society is my long-term goal. I aspire to work in the UK in the field of planning and policy-making.” She graduated with a Bachelors in Architecture from Pune University, Western Maharashtra, India.

Lucy Kirkham ...

reflects on successes & challenges

The vision was to bring young people and their teachers together in a space where they felt valued and heard. We envisaged purposeful discussion centred around the delegates' expertise in teaching and learning and their ideas about how this should respond to the climate crisis.

Conversations between young people and teachers, before the event, had revealed a concern that schools were not doing enough to respond to the climate crisis. This view is backed up by wider surveys.

The apparent lack of awareness and inaction over the climate crisis is fuelling so-called eco-anxiety in young people. Yet unlike other anxieties where you can unpack the problem and start to bring it into perspective, distress around the nature and climate emergency is entirely rational and the more you learn about the issue, the more serious and complex it proves to be.



So how can schools and teachers respond to this? When a conference was suggested, I immediately saw potential to create an opportunity for pupils and teachers who have experienced a severe narrowing of the curriculum with very few trips, visits or exchanges since 2019.

Reflection: So what? Now what?

I am a ... (please circle/underline/highlight):

Student	Teacher	Speaker	Facilitator	Observer
HEAD - what are your thoughts, questions, reflections? HEART - how do you feel and why? HANDS - what will you do now? What could you do next? 				

The delegates' 'head, heart and hands' reflections from end of the day [\[See feedback\]](#), along with the articles in this magazine, show that the conference provided a positive experience. The opportunity to share their concerns and ideas was valued. One pupil wrote

"It is much easier to bear the burden of climate change when you talk about it together".

A teacher commented,

"Pupils really value their voice and opinions and also value the chance to use their voice".

I am more convinced than ever, that bringing together students to purposefully discuss ideas and issues of importance is extremely valuable. We should work to enable this to happen more often and for more individuals.





The young people also appreciated hearing directly from a range of experts and, in some cases, getting involved in dialogue with our speakers. [See for example the interviews on pages 32 - 40]. The opportunity to interact with informed adults has been shown to reduce climate-anxiety. The speakers were chosen to represent different aspects of the climate emergency: engineering, writing, activism, climate justice, education and health. This stimulated wide-ranging discussions.

The nature and climate emergency is multi-dimensional; all sectors and professions will need to play their part if we are going to effectively mitigate and adapt to the changes.

This presents a challenge to secondary schools where cross-curricular learning proves to be difficult within the subject specialisms and exam system. The Curriculum for Wales sets out a framework to enable more flexibility and links but it remains to be seen how it will play out.

One key aim was to keep young people and their voices central to the day. We achieved this through the input of the Bassaleg School pupil organisers who were supported by university student, Rhiannon, a Bassaleg alumnus.



Bassaleg pupils, aged between 14 and 17 years old, chaired lecture hall sessions, modelling how young people's voices mattered and should be heard.

The student team helped to plan the programme, selected and met with all the speakers in lunchtime Zoom sessions, created graphics and recorded a pre-conference video to send out to all participating schools.



Pupils attending from other schools responded in kind, communicating effectively during the workshop sessions and presenting feedback to the whole conference in the final session. It was inspirational to witness this.

As teachers, we should think about how we can offer more of these opportunities to all students.

Teachers love to see young people growing personally and intellectually and so there was sometimes a tendency for teachers to leave the discussions to the pupils, taking on more of an observer or prompter role.

Despite it being an aim, meaningful dialogue between teachers and young people on the issue of climate education could have been more significant. Generally, in the positive atmosphere of the day, ideas were not challenged or critiqued.

Now what for climate education in schools?

Feedback from workshops 1 - 3

What should be taught?

- ☐ How climate change will affect Future Careers / e-Economy
- ☐ Want the positive as well as the negative
- ☐ Proactive approach - what we can do - communicating with policy makers and people in power, media - holding people to account
- ☐ Critical thinking - particularly around media
- ☐ Linked issues - plastic
- ☐ Future generations - linked to policy
- ☐ Climate justice
- ☐ Personal connections from local community to global

How should it be taught?

- ☐ Involving the community and in the community - outdoor and hands on
- ☐ Focusing on accessibility and hope - solutions and progress
- ☐ Specialist or across the curriculum, or both?
- ☐ Teachers being the guide of content, but students being the drive
- ☐ Involve experts - become expert
- ☐ Projects/discussions/creating space and talk opportunities
- ☐ Older pupils teaching younger pupils - different perspectives
- ☐ Told through narratives - humanise it
- ☐ Professional learning for teachers - current and informed
- ☐ Collaboration between organisations e.g. universities and schools

When should it be taught?

- ☐ Habit forming learning from nursery e.g. switching off lights: 'small steps'
- ☐ Encouraging a love and respect for nature from a young age - positive approach
- ☐ Teach what climate is first and then climate change
- ☐ Themes are introduced from a young age but grow in complexity and layers as you move through education - regularly revisiting. e.g. sustainability.
- ☐ Gradually build in the hows and whys: How does it affect me? How does it affect others? What actions can I take?
- ☐ How to talk about climate change - managing emotions
- ☐ Conversations around careers / pathways so that they can inform options choices



As Saskia describes on page 24 the normal power dynamic changed at the conference with young people centre stage - **nevertheless more thought is needed on how we can achieve fuller pupil-teacher dialogue.**

For me it started with listening more to the young people and there was certainly a lot of that happening at the conference.

We were so fortunate to have the support of Cardiff University and the Compassionate Education Foundation to enable us to bring 13 schools together for the conference. Whilst this created a special and valuable experience for the delegates, **many of the processes could be replicated at a smaller scale.**





For example, the conference team of Bassaleg pupils took on the task of **analysing all 250 climate education entitlement statements** that were written by the delegates in the final workshop session. [See article page 18]

The collaborative working and level of discussion involved in this task was very impressive and reminded me of the value of card games as a strategy for involving people in complex issues.

Our challenge is to roll out the positive energy and ideas from the conference whilst recognising some of its limitations.



This could be around replicating and refining the process of enabling purposeful discussions between pupils and teachers as well as starting to implement the climate education proposed by the delegates at the conference.

Our draft Entitlement [see page 20] is very much a starting point but it encapsulates a rich and diverse vision where schools in Wales could equip students with the skills to navigate the climate emergency.

These developments can happen at an individual, organisational and policy level. We hope that changes, however small, will have started already as a result of the conference. But schools are stretched and good intentions can quickly disappear in the pressure of day-to-day teaching.



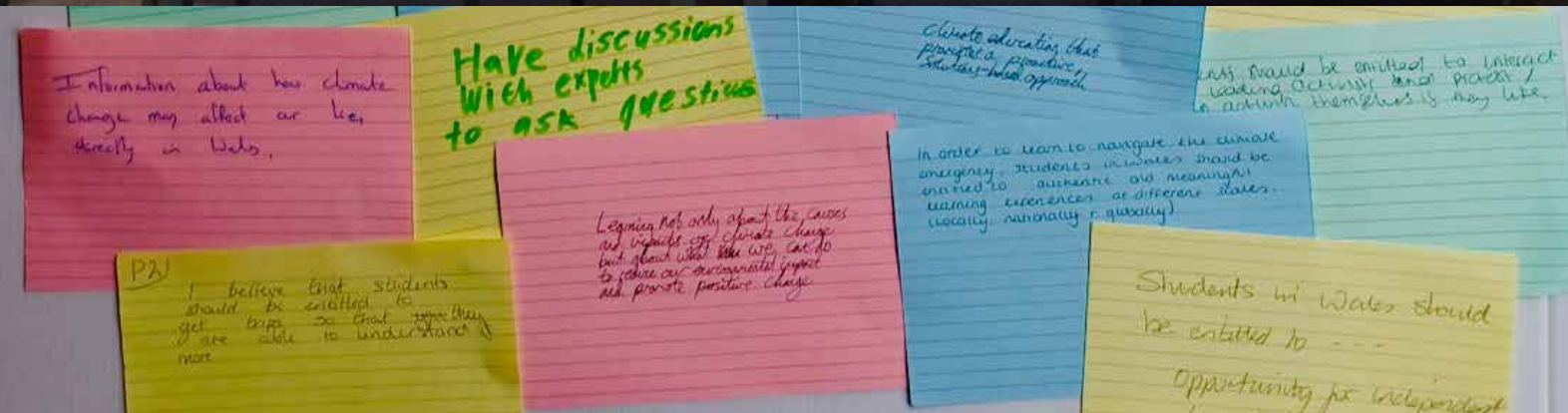
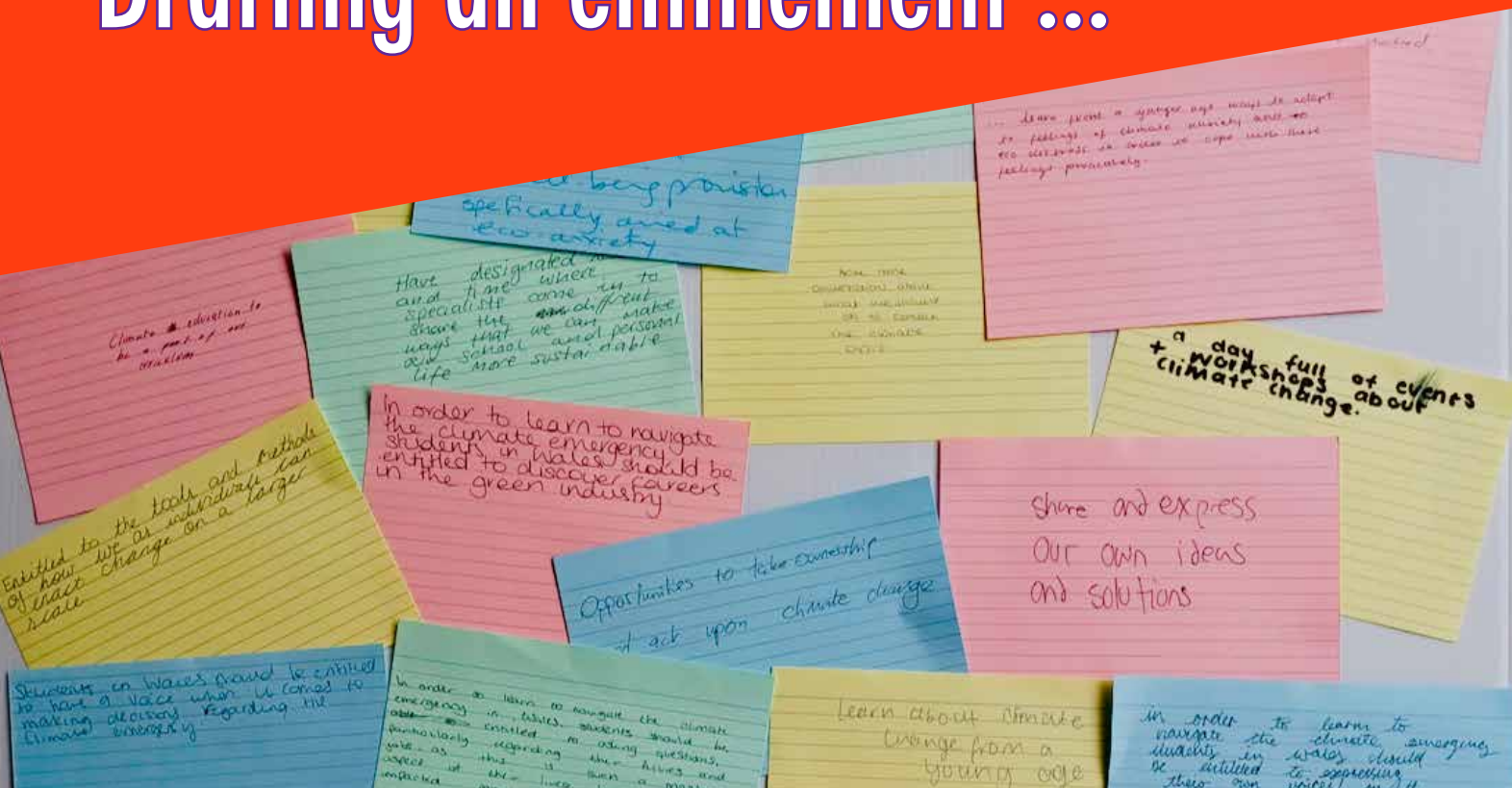
Working collectively will help to maintain motivation and offer mutual support. On 6th December, Bassaleg School plans to host a workshop day for teachers and pupils who attended the conference and any other interested schools in Wales. We will share our successes, such as lessons where we have implemented some of the ideas from the conference. We also plan to discuss and refine the draft entitlement to create a document to inform and influence practitioners and policy makers.

Ultimately the impetus for this work will be young people's passion, wisdom and concern.

A significant number of students in our schools feel that not enough is being done and they are right. In our efforts to address this, we should consider ...

how we can embolden our students, rather than burden them.

Drafting an entitlement ...



250 cards were collected from the last workshop of the conference where young people and teachers developed their ideas in response to finishing this statement:

“In order to learn to navigate the climate emergency, students in Wales should...”

[Click here to see printed collection of cards.](#)

The final session of the day was the most powerful, when young people reported back ideas from the workshops to conference. They spoke articulately and with passion, using examples such as comparing the response to flooding in Sudan with the Pontypridd floods.

After the conference, Bassaleg students and staff who attended the conference worked together to sort the cards and started to pull out some key themes including:

- ❑ a voice to share ideas and feelings
- ❑ a focus on action and change
- ❑ a curriculum that enables deep understanding & relevant skills
- ❑ appropriate resources, facilities and informed people
- ❑ go beyond the classroom
- ❑ a range of contexts: eg local - global, nursery - sixth form

These six themes grew into eleven entitlements as shown on the next page. We realise now that it was unrealistic to expect a draft climate education entitlement to emerge from a 45-minute session.

Ideas could not be contested and fully developed, instead we have a rich and diverse range of starting points. It is our intention to use these as a stimulus to following up the work.

A Draft Entitlement

In order to learn to navigate the climate emergency, students in Wales should be entitled to:

- ❑ Structures and spaces to constructively express and explore ideas, opinions and feelings about the climate crisis
- ❑ Meaningful and relevant well-being provision specifically aimed at eco-grief
- ❑ Involvement with actions to tackle the climate crisis including opportunities for engagement with decision-makers
- ❑ Some choice on how and what they learn around the climate crisis
- ❑ Learning experiences across, between and beyond subjects that involve some outdoor and non-school settings
- ❑ Confident, informed educators on climate change causes, impacts and actions, including but not exclusively teachers
- ❑ Education on how the climate crisis will influence their futures, including career opportunities
- ❑ Up-to-date and reliable resources about the climate crisis
- ❑ Developing the skills to independently learn about and navigate the climate crisis, now and in the future
- ❑ A range of contexts for learning about and responding to the climate crisis: individual, local, community, national, global
- ❑ A continuum of age-appropriate experiences and actions, beginning with climate education in the early years



Inspiring Justice Advocates

Lina Yassin

I had the pleasure of taking part in the *Teens and Teachers* conference and the privilege of addressing a room full of young minds and supportive teachers coming from different parts of Wales. **My goal was to share a perspective often sidelined: the unique challenges faced by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) due to the climate crisis.**

In my current role at the [International Institute for Environment & Development](#) (IIED), I have been fortunate enough to support the LDC Group in pushing for robust outcomes on climate change policies at global events, such as the Conference of Parties (COP). **I argued the need for climate education to be grounded in the principle of climate justice.** To put it simply, while climate change may appear to many in nations such as the UK as a distant threat, for countless individuals in the LDCs, it's a devastating present reality.

To drive this point home, I shared personal anecdotes from my homeland, Sudan. There, the question is no longer if we will experience floods each year, but rather, "How severe will the floods be this year?" In countries like Sudan, a single extreme weather event can significantly hinder economic development, displacing millions and creating a vicious cycle that proves challenging to break. **This recurring and detrimental impact is captured in the term - Loss and Damage.** This has become a central topic in international climate discussions.

"Loss and damage refers to the negative consequences of climate change on human societies and the natural environment. Climate change is affecting the frequency, intensity and geographical distribution of extreme weather events such as storms, floods and heat-waves, and slow-onset events such as sea level rise, ocean acidification, loss of biodiversity and desertification."

From a [LSE article -- read more](#)

It represents the irrecoverable costs borne by communities in vulnerable countries due to climate change impacts. You cannot adapt to a home washed away by floods or the grief that accompanies the loss of loved ones. **It's an unsettling reality that those suffering most from climate change are often those who contributed the least to its causes.**



This brings to light an undeniable need for reparative justice: compensating these nations for their irreversible losses.

As educators and students, understanding global climate issues is crucial. **It's about more than just scientific data and rising temperatures; it's about recognizing the human cost and the imbalances in who pays the price.** For the students in Wales, and throughout the UK, this holistic perspective is not just enlightening, but necessary. These students are the future voters and decision-makers. We need a generation with a strong commitment to climate justice and the principles of equity if the UK is to become a true champion in the fight against climate change.

To those reading this, **I urge you to delve deeper into the stories behind the climate catastrophe headlines.** Understand the concept of loss and damage, empathize with those facing its harshest realities, and commit to being advocates for change. Remember, you don't have to be in a specific profession to champion the fight against climate change; driven by principles of justice and equity, each of us has the potential to make a positive impact. The road to climate justice is long, but with an informed and empathetic generation rising, I'm hopeful we can navigate it together.

Reflections - from University colleagues

Peter Mackie interviews Sasha Eykyn

Several postgraduate students volunteered to facilitate student-teacher discussions. Peter interviews Sasha - one of those facilitators.

Bringing teachers and students into dialogue to explore an issue like climate change is unusual. How did this work?

It was good to see a different dynamic playing out between teachers and students. Young people have a special kind of knowledge and interest in climate-related issues compared with older generations, but the education system does not normally create the opportunities for this sort of dialogue. On the day, young people's expertise was centred and mobilised to challenge traditional teaching.

It was really refreshing to see many teachers acknowledging their lack of expertise in the subject area, and it was clear that they benefitted from the dialogue. Teachers seemed particularly keen on identifying solutions and ideas that they could take back into their classrooms.

Whilst the approach definitely disrupted the power dynamics between teachers and pupils, as facilitators we had an important role in ensuring that pupil voice remained at the heart of discussions, especially when teachers and expert observers understandably wanted to share their perspectives.

The discussions were structured around three questions about climate education: what, how, and when? To what extent was this effective?

I think the iterative nature of the dialogue worked really well at keeping the focus on pedagogical aspects, rather than tackling climate change as one complicated and daunting issue. This approach made the issue more tangible and gave people the opportunity to think about and build on their ideas as the day progressed.

Final discussions around the idea of a 'climate education entitlement' would have been much less detailed had we not spent the morning thinking about young people's priorities, needs and experiences.

What were the main issues that stood out to you?

There were so many ideas that emerged throughout the day, including during lunch discussions. This could be a long list. One of the main issues was the real **urgency** surrounding climate change. Everyone in the room felt it was a pressing issue, but that our current climate education struggles to capture this. This is related to the high degree of **anxiety** around the climate and ecological emergency, particularly in terms of information overload, the welfare of future generations and uncertainty about students' own futures.

Urgency

Anxiety

On the other hand, one of the expert presenters highlighted the role of **hope**, which really came through in the discussion workshops. It is easy to forget that much progress has been made in responding to some aspects of climate change – for example in reducing CFC use.

Hope

There was a clear message that climate change education needs to take a **multi-disciplinary** approach and that traditional modes of teaching and learning need to become **more diverse**. The young people expressed that their climate education has been siloed into specific subject areas and is often delivered in stagnant ways that do not do justice to the issue.

There is also a keen interest in developing an approach to education that considers how this global issue has a **local impact** in our own communities in Wales. The climate emergency is happening everywhere.

Finally, young people wanted to learn about how to make their concerns more concrete. What **action** might they take? Here, there is a **fascinating possible tension between the desire for activism and the sorts of actions that schools might want to promote**.

Does environmental activism have a place within education? This short BERA article explores these questions.

Prof Peter Mackie, [School of Geography & Planning, Cardiff University]

Teach the Future Wales 'Asks 2023'

Yasmine Ghorayeb

How can climate education be effectively integrated into educational policy within the specific context of Welsh education?

I found myself reflecting continuously on this question during the *'Teens and Teachers'* conference and over the past few months in my role with [Teach the Future \(Wales\)](#)

Teach the Future [TTF] Wales is a student-led campaign, supported by [Students Organising for Sustainability \(SOS-UK\)](#), that is working to re-purpose the Welsh education system around the climate and nature emergency, and climate justice. Through consultations with students, public bodies, and representatives from educational, youth and environmental organisations across Wales, **we have developed a set of five new policy 'Asks' tailored to the Welsh educational policy context and the [new Curriculum for Wales](#).**

Coincidentally, we presented our new Asks to the Welsh Parliament one day before the *'Teens and Teachers'* conference took place. While that conference involved those most impacted by climate education policies (or the lack thereof) in collaboratively developing a climate education entitlement grounded in their concerns and perspectives, the TTF (Wales) Parliamentary Reception aimed to engage directly with policymakers and decision makers by advocating for specific policy changes.

Having attended both events, I appreciate how complementary they were, with the themes emerging from the climate education entitlement aligning with the policy proposals.

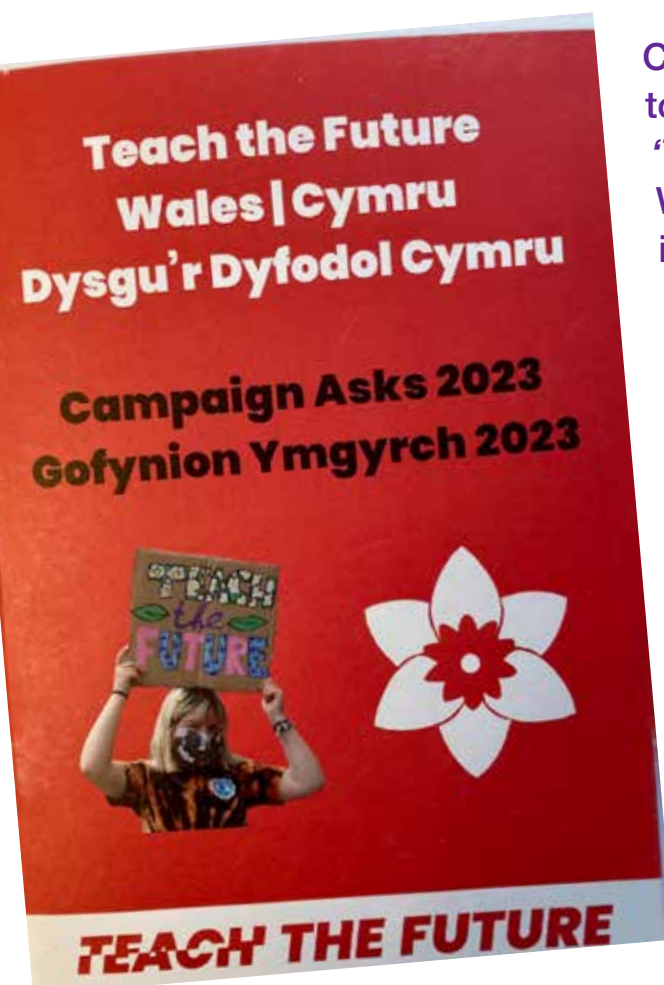
For instance, almost all students at the conference emphasised their right to receive support for—and accurate information to counter—climate anxiety. The TTF (Wales) 'Asks' have sought to advocate for this right by proposing additions to the [National Professional Learning Entitlement](#), such as the introduction of new professional learning resources and programmes that help educators identify and support pupils experiencing climate anxiety.

At the *'Teens and Teachers'* conference, I gained a wealth of insights on students' priorities regarding support with climate anxiety, which include helping students decipher mixed media messages on climate change and fostering safe spaces for students to share their fears and opinions.

Moving forward, I am committed to integrating these insights into our work in the hope that they are taken into consideration by policymakers if they plan – as they surely must – on developing the resources and programmes proposed.



Simon Gough Photographs
The Pier Head Parliamentary Reception



Click on cover for overview of 'Asks' in Welsh and English



Menna Christie and Yasmine Ghorayeb, introducing the 'Asks'

Resonating with the TTF (Wales) 'Asks', the students agreed emphatically about the need to mainstream climate education across all subjects, demonstrating recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of the task.

The Welsh Government's approach to curriculum reform has been described as reflecting Wales' [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) [WFGA] This offers five ways of working, which include "integration" and "collaboration". Picture a scenario where the new curriculum's provision of climate education is also subject to these principles.

The outcome? -- A seamless integration of climate education across the new curriculum's [Areas of Learning and Experience](#) and **a curriculum that fosters collaboration between practitioners from different disciplines** in delivering climate education as a cross-cutting theme. These aspirations could be met if, as the 'Asks' suggest, the WFGA is leveraged as a guiding principle for periodically reviewing climate education within the new curriculum.

Echoing the Future Generations Commissioner's ['Skills for the Future Report'](#) and the [Outdoor Education \(Wales\) Bill](#), the students emphasised their rightful claim to acquire the necessary skills to pursue 'green' careers and to have increased access to outdoor learning opportunities.

The 'Asks' target these concerns simultaneously by proposing a statutory requirement for all educational settings in Wales to develop personalised Climate and Nature Action Plans and for the government to provide adequate funding and support for this.

As schools develop these in collaboration with their students, they provide ample opportunities for green skills development, such as biodiversity surveys in biology classes, swift box building in design and technology lessons, and involving students in maintaining school gardens and renewable energy installations.

Many of these activities require the use of outdoor classrooms, which would inevitably increase the amount of time students spend learning outdoors as they develop climate solutions within their immediate environments.

As I simultaneously reflect on the *'Teens and Teachers'* Conference and the TTF (Wales) Parliamentary Reception, **my conviction that students' demands can be implemented within the framework of Welsh educational policy is reaffirmed.**

All we need now is resolute action to make these essential reforms a reality.



Simon Gough Photographs
The Pier Head Parliamentary Reception

Wales' best classroom - the great outdoors

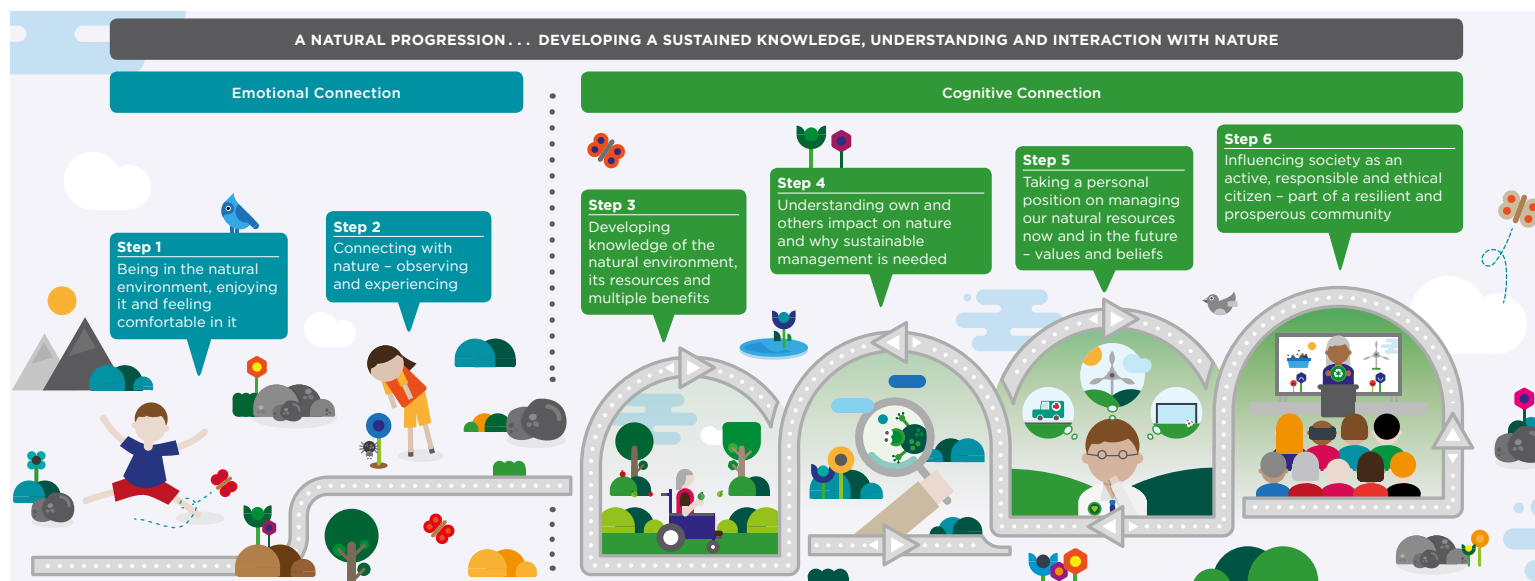
Aled Hopkin ...

I attended the event as an observer, which transpired to be more of a challenge than I had anticipated. I was asked to purely observe but it was difficult not to get caught up in the debate, ideas and conversations with the teachers and teens who had travelled to be part of the event.

Key to my role is promoting ...

learning in, learning about and learning for the natural environment.

This means supporting educators with tools to take learners **into Wales' best classroom, the great outdoors**. We do this through our Connection to Nature Pedagogy summarised by our Natural Progression steps model:



Part of poster. [See the whole poster](#)

Connecting to Nature is good for our health as well as being good for nature. As with everything in nature, education is intertwined with connections, causes and effects so it isn't a surprise that the Nature and Climate emergencies have become central to our work.

Hearing from the inspirational speakers as well as the discussions from the teens and teachers it was clear these themes are at the forefront of their work, ideas, interest and, unfortunately, their worries.

I accept and appreciate the worries people, especially younger generations, feel when we discuss the nature and climate emergencies.

However, I left the event feeling positive, hopeful, and driven to move forward in meaningful ways. For example, I have discussed the teens and teachers' priorities and ideas with my team at Natural Resources Wales, and we are looking to make changes to what and how we deliver and provide to meet their needs.

There are some incredible projects underway at Natural Resources Wales focusing on nature's recovery, community resilience to climate change and minimising pollution, some of which are available as educational case studies and resources on our Learning resources pages.

There is also much excellent practice going on across Wales with different groups using the natural environment to maximise health, learning and education opportunities.

The guest speakers at the event were varied, interesting and thought provoking. **However, it was the students who left the greatest impression on me from the conference.** They are clear in what they want to know, when and how they want to learn about the climate and nature emergencies. We need to respond to these challenges.

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- Climate Change Emergency - There is no Planet B!
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- Water Coast Path

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 **Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru**
Natural Resources Wales

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Natural Resources Wales.*

“YOU DON’T WANT TO LIVE YOUR LIFE IN FEAR, YOU WANT TO LIVE YOUR LIFE INFORMED”

Students from Ysgol Plasmawr, Cardiff interviewed Jacqui Murray

Jacqui began her career journey as a manufacturing specialist in the steel works in Port Talbot, where she worked with colleagues on increasing the efficiency of the steelworks to produce less CO2 per ton of steel. The result? Wales is a leading country in effective steelworks.

In 2017 Jacqui contributed to the government funded Faraday Battery Challenge that focuses on creating higher performing, safe and sustainable car batteries that are longer lasting and faster charging. The challenge integrated academia and industry specialists. For Jacqui the biggest problem with electric cars is that they are inaccessible in terms of both cost and charging points, problems she began to address during the 2017 challenge.

Currently Jacqui is working at the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland. Click on visual below for more information. She is Chief Operating Officer. They recently opened a new £58,000,000 building that is eco-friendly including a green roof, water harvesting, solar panels, and digital manufacturing.

She enjoys working with the team of people around her and describes this as the “right way to work”. As a materials engineer, Jacqui wants to help get solutions to the current state of the planet and make a difference and has started with low carbon cars.

As we discussed her views on where she sees the world in 50 years and the climate crisis, she simply stated that “Climate change just will be”. This simple statement suggests that no matter what happens, climate change will be there, that we and the world will survive, and evolution will self-balance like a “self-righting system”. However, it’s “not too late to actually do something” to enable change.

She described how more car sales last year were electric. We discussed a post carbon society, ultimately concluding that carbon-based items, such as tarmac and concrete, are “inherent to life”. Living in a full ecological footprint is the biggest challenge as many of our daily items are made of carbon, making it very hard to switch to a reduced ecological footprint.



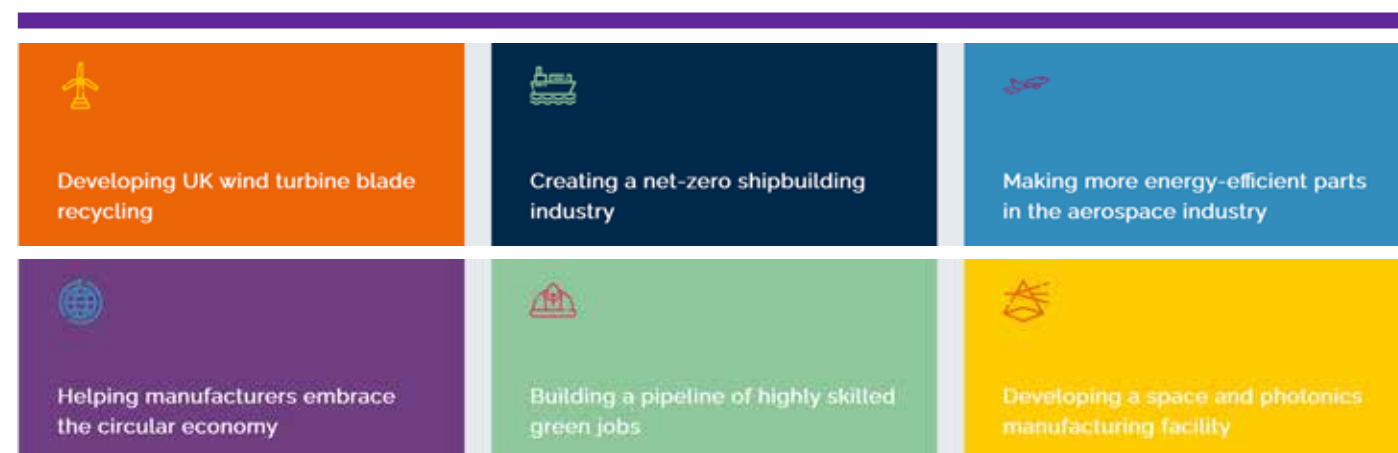
The recent cost of living crisis showed Jacqui that “Crisis is where you get change”, which although a threatening statement, illustrates that in a time of crisis people’s mindsets change. However, this is yet to happen in our country.

Many teams, including Jacqui’s, are working on how electric cars can be more affordable, have a more efficient battery, and be more cost effectively produced on a massive scale. The supply chain and manufacturing work has yet to be set up that will enable us to manufacture vehicles on a massive scale with reduced consequences both in terms of cost and ecological impact.

Jacqui suggested that there will be some big flood events in the UK in the near future which will change the attitude of the nation, possibly shifting us into a mindset of saving the planet, forcing people in charge to make a difference in our society. One way she suggested to feel more secure is through ‘micro-action’.

Jacqui’s favourite quote is “Our greatest fear is not that we are powerless, it is that we have power beyond measure” depicting that all of us have power beyond measure that we are unaware of and unaware of how to control. The question is how to engage with that power

Jacqui is one of many doing just that.



SOLUTIONS, POLITICAL VIEWS AND INSPIRING WORDS

Students from Ysgol Gyfun Gwent Is Coed interviewed Rhiannon Hawkins

Rhiannon Hawkins is a recent Oxford University Graduate. She went to school at Bassaleg and is soon to do a PhD at the University of Glasgow.

She has a scholarship to research the impact of the flooding of the Clyde river, especially on the poorer community.

Besides her already impressive resume, she also has a role in the Royal College of Psychiatrists as a guest speaker. When a first year undergraduate, her paper 'Inequalities within understanding of Eco Distress' was published. It focused on climate anxiety and the effect of climate change on low-income areas, topics which, as young people, connect us all.

Rhiannon is involved in an Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health initiative: [Ecological Crisis and the Impact on Mental Health](#). This explores a variety of ideas including 'Eco-Anxiety'.

When asked about the impact of climate change on low-income areas, Rhiannon pointed to the 'loophole of issues' created by government policies; for example, council homes built on floodplains which are impacted regularly resulting in a need for more government help in the future.

Rhiannon argued that policies in place do not help recover as fast as is possible, inferring that the current government policies have impacted negatively on individuals within our community.

When asked how to respond to these issues she stressed the importance of politicians needing to "break the barrier" and prove not to be just 'wealthy' and 'privileged' which in turn would build trust and create a powerful community to make the changes needed to save our future.

Rhiannon shared her passion for thinking of solutions to social and climate issues, and how she would love to become a policy maker so that they actually benefit and aid the people in need, and their cultures and beliefs.

This problem was raised when talking about aid organisations that are there to 'save' the most affected when in reality they may damage culture and not respond to important needs.

Rhiannon feels that when considering mental healthcare in the UK, there appears to be no risk management in place when facing significant issues, therefore, creating barriers and damage. However, she suggested that by collecting reports from the smaller communities affected and writing case studies we could contact politicians and help create a significant difference.



When questioned about political understanding of climate related issues, Rhiannon argued that cuts in funds for academia, have led to political leaders undermining the issue.

Rhiannon recognises that a deeper understanding of the issue is required before anyone can play a key role in the solution.

As students we left the interview feeling inspired to make a change but at the same time learnt that it's okay to not understand things.

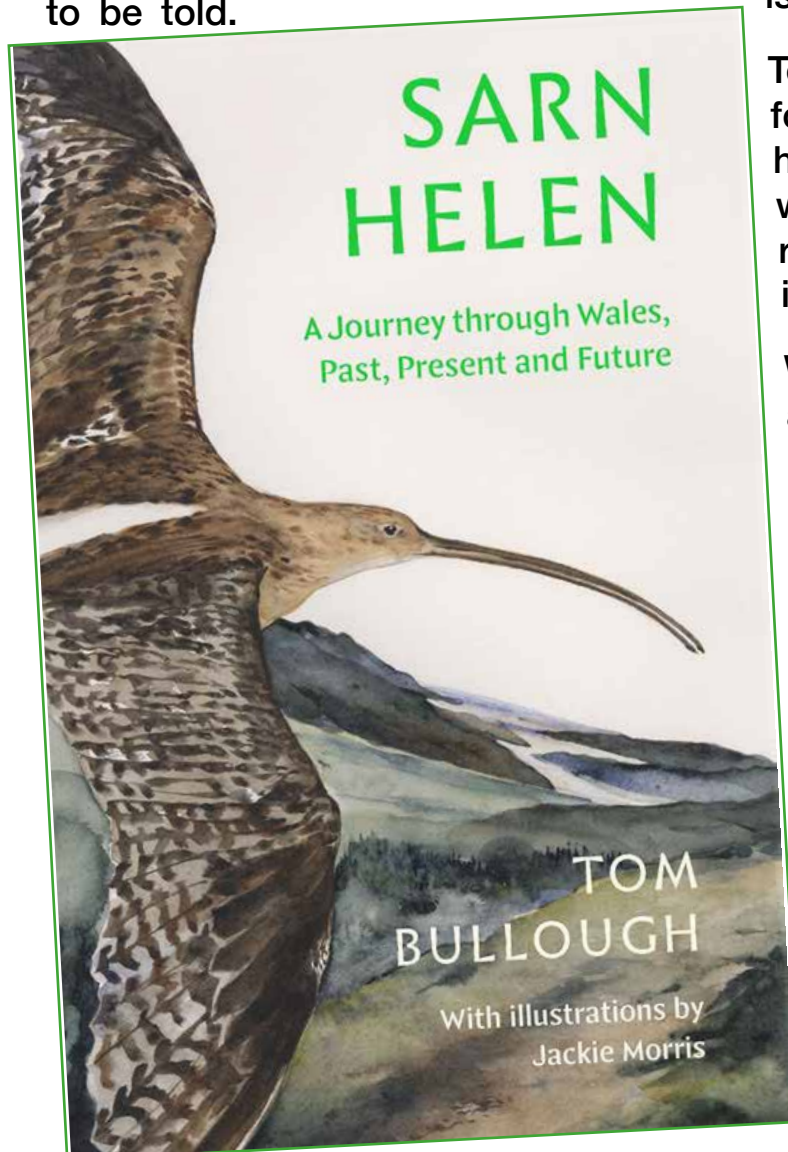
Sometimes it is not surprising that we are scared by discussing our future.

SARN HELEN - AN INSPIRING WALK

Students from Morriston Comprehensive interviewed Tom Bullough

One of the highlights of our day was meeting the author and guest speaker Tom Bullough. It was delightful to meet the published author who is so engaged in climate activism and wanting to make a difference. We asked him a range of questions about his writing and his commitment to helping address the climate crisis.

Amongst other things, Tom talked to us about the importance of viewing the climate crisis, not just as facts, figures and graphs, but as part of human experience, and as stories that need to be told.



We asked Tom about where he got his inspiration from for his most recent work, Sarn Helen.

He shared with us that he didn't originally intend for his walk across Sarn Helen, (the Roman road that once cut through Wales from Neath in the south to Caerhun in the north) to inspire a book, but instead wanted an escape from lock-down and to experience some different scenery.

He got the change in scenery, but what he also found was that the evidence of climate change issues was impossible to ignore.

Tom said that some of the things he found most worrying on his walk were how overwhelmingly bare the hills were, prompting him to take part in research to discover our natural world is clearly being destroyed – shockingly.

Wales is 16th from the bottom in a league table showing how much of the natural world is left in 240 countries around the world. Clearly, we have a lot of work to do! Tom also spoke of the oppressive heat of the summer of 2020, another sign that climate change was not just on its way but is already happening.

Tom also gave us some top tips on writing and getting involved in literary events like the Hay Festival and making sure we tell stories because they truly impact people's lives and thought processes.



Tom Bullough on starling murmurations and the climate crisis - Hay Festival Tales 2023

[Click on image to view video](#)

Promisingly, Tom told us that when he first wanted to write about climate change back in 2019, very few publishers were interested. But fast forward three years - 20% of the new books being promoted at the Hay Festival had a climate change focus.

We have returned to school with many ideas and thoughts to reflect on, both from our interview with Tom and the conference as a whole.

The messages that stand out to us the most are that climate change is an enormous challenge, with a huge shift that is needed.

However, we are all in it together. This is not in any way the end. Together we can be empowered to make a change and collectively that change can happen, and we can secure a positive future for our world.

THE NATURE OF CHANGE

Delegates from Bishop of Llandaff High School meet Katie Riley

We were lucky to meet with Katie Riley at the Climate Conference. She shared her experience of activism, as well as giving us an insight into her pathway into climate and social justice.

Firstly, we discussed her background and why she became conscious about the environment and the potential we have to make a difference. Katie shared how her interest in politics at A Level and then at degree level in university fuelled her passion and urge to learn more about our planet and people.

Katie feels that her journey started in 2019 when she became increasingly aware of climate change in the media. We discussed the lack of transparency in the media of issues faced by people all over the world, especially those in the global south who find themselves facing the consequences of human action leading to climate change.

Katie phrased climate media coverage to frequently be “two dimensional” and argued how to make progress we must understand the true narrative.

We were keen to find out Katie’s opinion on the best way to take action. Here, we felt her key message was to involve oneself as much as possible in local activism and volunteering.

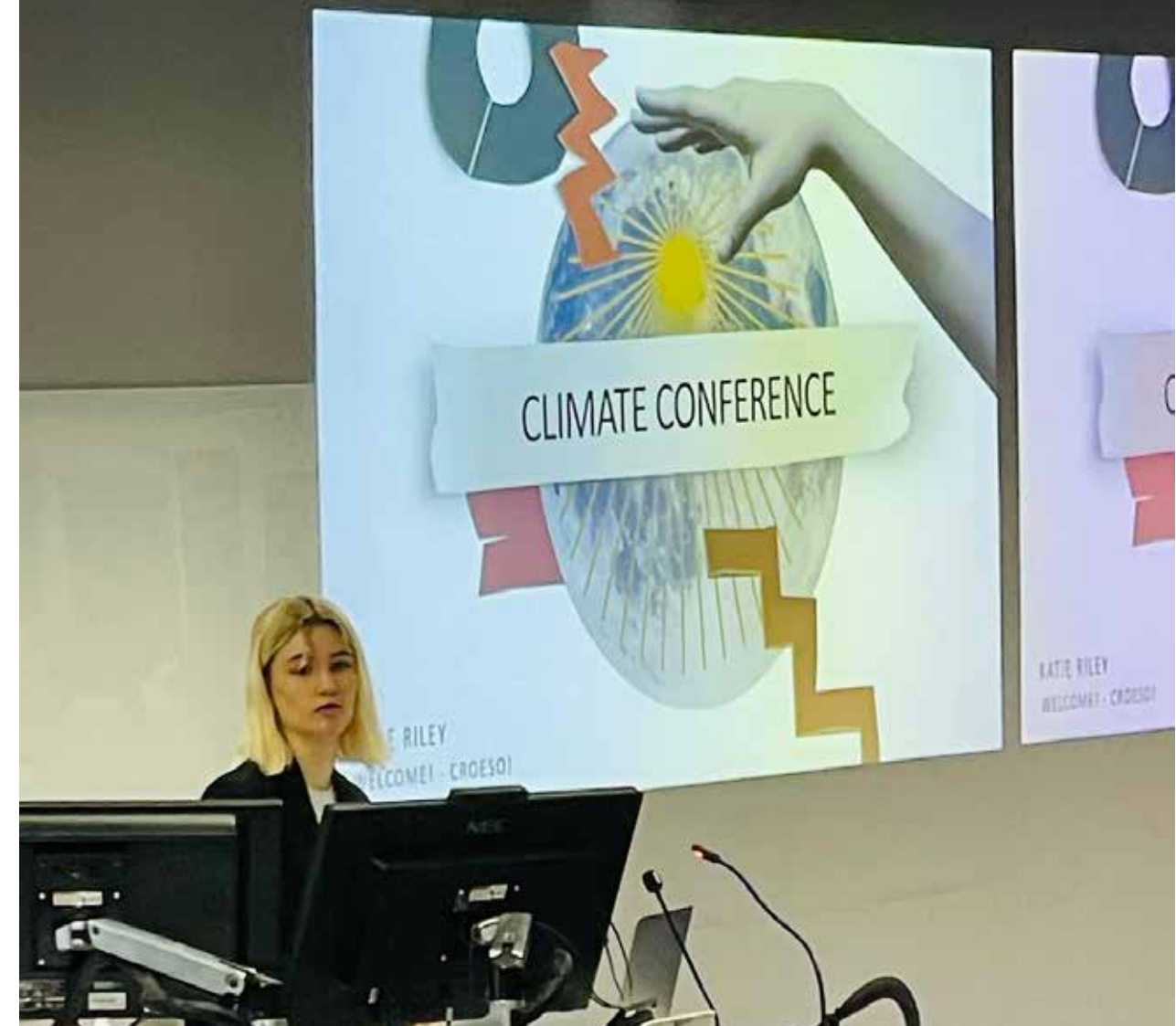
Katie first got involved in Youth Strike for Climate and the Re Earth Initiative, and is now the strategy officer for COP 28. She argues that volunteering and supporting our planet is a key way forward. I found this particularly interesting as I volunteer for my local conservation group and am a Youth Climate Ambassador for Wales where we have recently launched a petition to legislate the status of climate refugees in the UK.



A drawing featuring those involved in the book ...

‘The Nature of Change’.

Click on visual for information about the project .



Overall, I feel that the central message Katie shared with us was that change lies in accessible education and by humanising the issue of climate change and social justice. This is expressed in Katie’s self-published book ‘*The Nature of Change*’ in which she explores the hidden stories of people across the world - both those affected by climate change and those striving to make a difference.

Ultimately, the heart of climate justice must be people driven. This is especially paramount for indigenous people in LICs who lack the resources with which to protect themselves against the ravages of global warming. After talking with Katie about her

book and her work with Teach the Future and Climate Emergency we considered the importance of both activism from grassroots organisations, big business and governments.

What I took from our discussions with Katie is that the biggest change we can make is to educate ourselves and others in order to create an accessible message for everyone and humanise the issues of climate change.

In summary, I feel that Katie is an inspiring person to talk to being a young person who has already worked to break the mould and make a positive impact on our planet.

SIR TIM AND THE TERRIFIC TRIO

Delegates from Ysgol Bro Preseli meet Tim Brighouse

Seven Year 12 pupils from Ysgol Bro Preseli travelled to Cardiff University for the Climate Change Conference and three of us had the privilege of interviewing Professor Sir Tim Brighouse, former Schools Commissioner for London, Chief Education Officer in Oxfordshire and Birmingham, -- and author.

In preparation for the interview, we decided, as a group, on the questions we would ask Sir Tim. We wanted to ensure that all questions asked were relevant to our lives and our school and, therefore, the majority circulated around the issues we are facing in our local community and our school; staffing, climate change in rural communities, the issues that arise when schooling takes place on an unsustainable campus, and so on.

His responses emphasised the importance of giving pupils a voice, for example, through an eco-committee within schools and challenging local MPs and SMs during their weekly surgeries to make a difference at a grassroots level.

Sir Tim stressed it wasn't too late to educate pupils about the causes of climate change, and how to improve resilience. He expressed the regret and guilt he personally felt about the lack of education given to pupils regarding climate change in the past.

In Ysgol Bro Preseli, we've felt the pinch of teachers leaving the profession and, therefore, we felt obliged to question him about how climate change education can be delivered without the educators.

He suggested the importance of not only keeping teachers in the profession, but also of forming a link between schools and university experts, as well as utilising technology to deliver a first-grade education regarding the climate emergency that affects each and every one of us.

School pupils should be able to receive information from the very best and learn about a key subject in an engaging environment. This hopefully would lead to more pupils having a better understanding of, and interest in, climate change, and more people acting over their planet.

Finally, we challenged Sir Tim on the irony of preaching about environmental and net zero targets whilst our school and many others across Wales burn oil to heat our classrooms. Sir Tim empathised with us about the struggle many Welsh schools face about creating renewable and sustainable schools through which students could learn the importance of protecting our environment. The sad reality however is that we are unable to transform the way schools across the country are run and must simply campaign over our right to better and environmentally friendly campuses.

Concluding -- we came together to think of main 'entitlements'. A priority for us was the need for specialists in all aspects of the climate emergency as well as strategies that can be used to deal with them to be made accessible to us in school.



As students we thought it hugely important that climate education be included across the curriculum, not only in subjects such as geography, but in languages, sciences, and history, in order to come to terms fully with the situation and its different outcomes.

Our biggest take-away from the conference was Sir Tim's anecdote regarding starfish on a beach to emphasise the importance of **small actions in our day-to-day life** and how important our impact is on dealing with the climate emergency.

Key is the need for:

- ◇ a platform for students specifically to voice their concerns, opinions and questions on climate change;
- ◇ students' voices to be heard about how the the issues are taught across the curriculum and how resources, such as experts and research, are used to inform us in a useful way.

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