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EVALUATION OF OUR BRIGHT FUTURE MID-TERM REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

Our Bright Future is a programme of 31 individual projects across the UK that brings together the environmental and youth sectors. The portfolio of projects share the common aim of empowering young people (aged 11-24) to lead future environmental change. Projects range in scale and activities, including practical environmental conservation, campaigning, leadership and influencing, developing sustainable enterprises and vocational training. Each of the 31 projects will run for up to five years and has been allocated around £1m in order to scale up or replicate existing activity to reach new beneficiaries or new locations.

The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) has invested just over £33m to support the programme which is governed by a consortium of eight partner organisations led by The Wildlife Trusts (TWT). All eight partners are expected to support the delivery of the programme by: linking projects together; providing specialist expertise/experience; being responsible for particular elements of the programme; and, in some cases, delivering projects.

In addition to administering the funding, TWT are also coordinating two of the three programme 'Functions' (the Share Learn Improve Function and Policy Function) to support projects to work together. National Youth Agency (one of the consortium partners) is coordinating the Youth Function. The aim is for the programme to achieve an overall impact which is greater than the sum of its parts.

This is the executive summary for the Mid-Term Evaluation Report produced for the Our Bright Future programme. The Mid-Term evaluation covers the first three years of the programme from set-up in June 2016 to December 2018.

Evaluation methodology

The programme evaluation aims to identify, analyse and assess the collective impact of the 31 projects; the added value of the programme; whether it has achieved its long-term ambitions and finally, to gather evidence of impacts, good practice and lessons learned. The evaluation is drawing upon the following key sources:

- **Secondary data:** produced by project managers including quarterly and annual monitoring reports, project evaluation reports and participant case studies together with data collected by the programme team (e.g. Youth Forum survey, post-parliamentary event survey, influence log).
- **Primary data collection:** annual interviews with project managers, the programme team, youth representatives, internal and external programme stakeholders; case study project visits (including observations and interviews); and a short survey of a sample of participants (known as the Outcomes Flower, this received 455 responses in 2018).



"What we like about it [Our Bright Future] is it has given us the opportunity to come together with new organisations, potential partners, and learn from each other. We've felt the benefit of that, particularly working alongside the youth sector organisations... to find synergies, that's been very useful.... We think the idea of building learning between programmes, building relationships, is very valuable." Consortium Member

Our Bright Future

ENGAGEMENT & OUTCOMES

The programme has directly engaged 85,788 young people:

- 70.3% engaging for up to one day;
- 19.2% engaging for up to three months; and
- 10.5% engaging for over three months.

This already far exceeds the programme's overall target of 60,000 young people participating in Our Bright Future activities.

Four Outcomes underpin the programme. Projects are all contributing in some way to these outcomes, and it is upon these outcomes that the success of the programme as a whole will be assessed.

Outcomes

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. OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people have gained a range of knowledge and new skills both specific to environmental topics, and more general soft and transferable skills.

- 3,932 environmental qualifications or awards have been gained by young people, 80% of which have been accredited.
- 1,239 John Muir Awards have been gained.
- 758 young people have gone on to internships, work experience, apprenticeships or employment.
- 214 entrepreneurial projects (50 businesses, 164 social enterprises) have been started by young people.

Evidence suggests that some young people have also improved their attitude and motivation to learn, and that this has resulted from being outdoors and being in a non-classroom environment.

“The young people also benefit from space to themselves and the alternative learning environment provided which may suit some more than a traditional classroom. The very fact that they voluntarily show up when they don't for school is a success.” Project Manager

Projects have improved participants' self-confidence, well-being and mental health according to widespread accounts (most of which are anecdotal but some more robustly evidenced by surveys). Evidence suggests that the following has contributed to improved confidence and mental health:

- Being outside;
- Engaging with nature and wildlife;
- Undertaking physical work; and
- The stability and structure offered by regular engagement.



Improvements in confidence, well-being and mental health have encouraged and supported some participants to take up opportunities they would not otherwise have done e.g. new roles, speaking in public, transitioning into education, and independent living.

Figure 1: Project activities and processes leading to increased employability and positive mental health



Next Steps for Our Bright Future

Reflect on targets: Why have they been met already? What could change?

Strengthen evidence: Consider introducing stronger indicators for skills/knowledge gained; conducting programme-wide studies (e.g. on skills, well-being); improving project surveys, monitoring and reporting.

Investigate further: To what extent has Our Bright Future influenced participants' future action/careers? What specific skills are gained through social action in the natural environment?

2. OUTCOMES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITIES

The Our Bright Future programme is supporting a wide range of terrestrial and marine habitats, through a variety of conservation tasks.

- 25 out of 31 projects are undertaking physical environmental improvements.
- 1,520 community spaces have been improved or created to date, exceeding the target at the mid-term stage.
- Projects have led to 411 tonnes of waste being diverted from landfill.

The most common site improvement activities have been: pruning and clearing vegetation, planting activities, providing food or shelter for specific species (such as bees, birds, bats, and hedgehogs), and actions for climate change adaptation. Given that evidence for environmental change takes time to observe, more robust evidence is expected at the end of the programme. Although, some impacts may still not be seen within this timeframe.

Qualitative evidence and a survey of 450 participants across the programme in 2018 demonstrated that the **projects have increased participants' awareness of environmental issues** and improved their attitudes towards spending time in the natural environment.

The number of spaces improved has far exceeded the programme's original target. Activities are positively benefiting many users of different spaces, particularly schools and colleges. There is anecdotal evidence indicating projects have increased community cohesion, improving perceptions of young people and participants' connectedness to their wider communities.

Activities which have reportedly worked well in encouraging the adoption of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours include:

- Simple and tangible activities (e.g. beach cleans, removal of invasive species, collecting and using food waste);
- Activities that generate both social and environmental outcomes, particularly the opportunity to meet other young people;
- Providing warmth and food through activities (e.g. foraging and cooking on campfires);
- Fostering links between young people and their local environment; and
- Longer-term engagement - reinforcing messages and behaviours.

"It's given me more knowledge to be careful about rubbish, it makes you think twice before you put it in the bin, you think how can I recycle this so it doesn't go in the rubbish."
Participant



Next Steps for Our Bright Future

Strengthen evidence: Improve evidence of environmental change by backing up reports with measurable scientific evidence, surveying or 'before and after' photographic documentation.

Follow up: To what extent do changes in attitude lead to changes in behaviour?

3. OUTCOMES FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

Our Bright Future programme and projects are making positive steps towards influencing policy and practice. Key achievements at the mid-term stage include:

- A parliamentary event, co-designed by young people, attended by 50 MPs.
- The collaborative creation of young people's 'Policy Asks' through a series of eight events across the UK:
 1. **More time spent learning in and about the natural environment;**
 2. **Support to get environmental jobs;**
 3. **Create space for young people to be heard and play an active role in society.**
- 142 influencers (external stakeholders in positions of influence) engaged by Our Bright Future projects so far.
- Development of the #owningit campaign.

Political influencers (Local MP/MSP/AM/NI MLA, mayors, councillors) are by far the largest category engaged with by both projects and young people. There is evidence of a wide range of specific and localised changes to environmental practices e.g. changing school catering policies, installing recycling facilities, securing commitment for a clean air zone.

Outcomes of project influencing activities at this stage have resulted from:

- Influencers engaged e.g. MPs visits.
- Good practice shared.
- Connections made e.g. bringing organisations together to learn.
- Campaigns established.
- Young people being consulted e.g. coordinating responses from young people to official consultations.

The Our Bright Future programme has made strong initial connections within the third sector and public sector (including government departments), having shared evidence and inputted into policy consultations and discussions.

Outcomes for the programme include:

- New lines of communication with relevant organisations have been developed;
- Awareness of the programme has been raised;
- Blogs/vlogs have been produced by influential bloggers;
- Evidence has been shared with relevant initiatives; and
- Defra policy has reportedly been influenced.

It is worth noting that the individuals and organisations that Our Bright Future wishes to influence are subject to many other lobbies, and that awareness raising is a good first step in this process.



Next Steps for Our Bright Future

Define: success by setting indicators/targets for influencing policy and practice; and define strategy, using the Policy Asks as a basis for project influence at a local level.

Monitor: success and outcomes of the campaign, Policy Asks and Parliamentary events.

Share: the wealth of examples of how projects have influenced policy and practice through producing a practical guide.

4. OUTCOMES OF THE YOUTH-LED & PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

The programme has put several mechanisms in place to involve young people in designing and delivering the programme, including youth representatives involved in programme governance and a Youth Forum with up to two members from each project. The involvement of young people in the programme is considered positive. However, the roles of youth reps could be made clearer, as could the overall expectation of what 'youth-led' means in the context of the programme. Members of the Youth Forum value opportunities to meet and network and report increased confidence as a result. However, there is also a need for better communication of Youth Forum activities to other participants and project staff.

There is strong evidence that young people are leading at a project level, and a number of projects report setting up new youth panels/forums or, in a couple of cases, inviting young people to participate on boards. Giving young people a voice has helped them to realise that they deserve to be heard. Skills, knowledge and confidence appear to be an important contributor to empowerment, a pre-requisite to young people taking further action, responsibility and developing their own projects. This is important given the overall programme aim to create the environmental leaders of the future.

"Traditionally conservation charities are not that diverse and it's really allowing us to be a bit more reflective; for example, our board of trustees has invited two reps from the project onto the board to give the view of young people." Project Manager

Key outcomes of a partnership approach have been learning, knowledge exchange and relationship development between consortium and portfolio organisations.

"We get the learning from the network. When things aren't going as you expect, you find out about the experience on other projects and that they are experiencing similar challenges." Project Manager

Our Bright Future funding and learning opportunities have developed collective practitioner skills, experience and knowledge of how to facilitate and support environmental activities with young people. The SLI face to face workshops and Annual Programme Seminars have been particularly valued in terms of learning and building relationships amongst portfolio organisations. It is felt that changes reported by organisations in both the environmental and youth sectors have come about much more rapidly than they would have without the programme.



Next Steps for Our Bright Future

Define: What does youth-led mean in the context of Our Bright Future?

Develop: the knowledge, experience, and resources for supporting youth-environment activities into a sustainable asset with benefit beyond the programme.

CONCLUSIONS

Evidencing the outcomes of such a wide-ranging portfolio of projects has been challenging. There are however, good indications of outcomes in relation to most areas of the programme and engagement levels are above target.

It is also important to recognise that there is a strong likelihood that many impacts will not become apparent until well after the programme has ended. In addition, it is hoped that the programme will leave a legacy through the relationships developed between portfolio organisations and through the improvements in processes and evidence gathering that the programme has supported.

The Mid-Term Evaluation offers an important opportunity to respond to findings while delivery of the programme and some projects are ongoing. Recommendations are being reviewed by the programme team, Steering Group and Evaluation Panel but some will also be of relevance to project managers and delivery staff.

For a full understanding of the programme's processes, delivery and outcomes to date, please see the full evaluation report.

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