

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Feedback is an environmental campaigning charity working for food that is good for the planet and its people. To do so, we challenge power, catalyse action, and empower people to create positive change. In 2019, Feedback was granted £451,844 for our EcoTalent project, which ran from 2019 to 2021. Eco Talent was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund as part of the Our Bright Future programme.

EcoTalent aimed to break down the barriers that restrict access to the progressive food, farming, and environmental sector in the UK by creating open, inclusive, paid (Real Living Wage) internship opportunities for 36 young people (aged 18-25) from underrepresented communities. These 12-15-week-long internship placements were with partner (host) organisations across England – from campaigning organisations to community kitchens and local farms and gardens. All hosts shared Feedback's vision of a sustainable, regenerative, fair food system for all. At the heart of these internship placements was providing EcoTalent interns an opportunity to learn about the food system and its effect on the environment as well as equip them with the practical and employability skills of how to provide the food of and for the future.

Alongside EcoTalent, in 2021, Feedback kicked off our anti-oppressive practice project, wherein we recruited 7 other organisations in the progressive food, farming, and environmental sector in a learning programme to critically reflect on racism, how it manifests in the sector, and steps to create a sector that is anti-racist. Additionally, Feedback provided further engagement for 7 former EcoTalent interns vis-à-vis our Participatory Action Research programme, through which these young researchers explored how we might transition to a just and regenerative food system in England, taking into account our individual, lived experiences.

We are pleased with the results of this work. Overall, we were able to create 46 paid internship placements for EcoTalent interns across 20 host organisations, having received over 400 applications and conducted more than 100 interviews for these placements. The increase in numbers is partly due to extra support we received for this project through the UK Government's Kickstarter Scheme. We delivered these EcoTalent internships across four iterations of the programme, with a fifth scheduled for 2022. Moreover, we delivered 4 additional training workshops, and our PAR researchers similarly delivered 4 workshops. Feedback was also invited to speak at two talks on this issue – including one hosted by Coventry University.

The overwhelming positive feedback we received from hosts and young people makes it clear to us that paid work opportunities for young people, designed for those with significant barriers to entry in the sector are much needed. Whilst challenging to fund, the increased emphasis on more diversity being required in the sector has seen an increase in the amount of funding available to organisations aiming to do anti-racist work in the food & climate sectors

We are grateful to Our Bright Future and the National Lottery Community Fund for their support of this work. We hope you enjoy reading the full report.

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INTRODUCTION

Background and context

Feedback is a campaign group working to regenerate nature by transforming our food system – by challenging power, catalysing action, and empowering people to achieve positive change. Through our previous Our Bright Future-funded project ‘From Farm to Fork’, we engaged thousands of young people, increasing their awareness of urgent environmental and social issues and enabling them to become part of the solution through volunteering in and co-creating projects. Building on the success of that project and our engagement with young people, EcoTalent sought to provide a small group of young people with a more in-depth engagement in the climate crisis, the food system, and organisations working towards a sustainable future by providing paid internship opportunities. Our vision was to create new, accessible pathways into the sector for those currently underrepresented and to nurture future leaders for the sustainable food sector.

The lifespan of the project saw some cataclysmic shifts in the global political landscape and how we understand the climate crisis. The release of the latest IPCC report highlighting the runaway effects of climate change¹, plus a largely disappointing response from global governments and corporations at the COP26 conference in November 2021, has clarified the urgency with which drastic changes are needed in order to safeguard life on earth. Alongside this, the renewed prominence of racial justice movements like Black Lives Matter and environmental justice work has underlined the notion that those that suffer the most from the effects of climate change and social inequity are also those whose voices are listened to the least, and our power structures and institutions play a massive role in systematically shutting them off from meaningful participation in building solutions.

Given the significant lack of diversity and representation in the workforces of food and environment organisations, renewed scrutiny of the sector by social justice movements demanded an honest and challenging process of reflection on what oppressive dynamics may be being perpetuated through organisational cultures, including Feedback’s. These hugely significant shifts clearly demonstrated that the project needed to adapt in order to address these issues in the work, and the broad focus on increasing young people’s level of participation in the sector gave us the opportunity to be dynamic and design and deliver activities that would directly address these interrelated issues.

Another consideration is the more practical context in which the project took place. The COVID-19 pandemic drastically affected the way the project could be delivered, as we shifted to remote working. The project also included significant staff changes throughout, which enabled us to bring new talent and fresh direction in the staff delivery team, but also naturally engendered periods of capacity challenges and instability.

Finally, the Government response to unprecedented levels of Universal Credit claimants partly caused by COVID-19 was to announce the Kickstart Scheme in early 2021, a paid employment scheme through which thousands of young people could access 6-month long work placements. This shifted the landscape and availability of paid work opportunities significantly in the UK and was another opportunity to adapt the project to work in step with this scheme.

¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>

This rapidly changing internal, national and global environment required swift and significant adaptations throughout the project, which we have explored further throughout this report.

Rationale: Why is this project needed?

The climate crisis is one of the biggest threats to humanity. However, it's not widely understood how big a contribution our current food system has made in fuelling this crisis. Food production is the single greatest impact humans have on the environment - from food waste and habitat destruction, to growing animal feed for factory farms and soil depletion leaving future harvests at risk. It's clear that the food system needs to undergo radical change.

To move to a more sustainable food system model, changes are needed throughout the farm to fork journey, encompassing farming methods, processing, transporting, supplier practices, and consumer demand. In the UK, as a multicultural society with deeply entrenched social and economic inequality, it is essential that transitioning to a more sustainable model has a justice-centred approach, with more opportunities for people from communities of marginalisation to have their voices heard on issues that affect them directly.

This lack of representation is also reflected in the workforces of the food and environment sectors. The Policy Exchange's 2017 report 'The Two Sides of Diversity' found farming to be the least diverse sector, and the environmental sector the second least diverse.² If the move to a sustainable food system is to be successful, social and cultural change is needed in the sector itself. The sector must become more inclusive and representative of the communities it hopes to serve.

Feedback's journey in this respect started in 2017 with a period of self-reflection. We were hosting several graduates for 3-6-month periods in voluntary roles assisting with our campaigns. We recognised that these opportunities were inaccessible to people whose socio-economic status prevented them from being able to support themselves during these placements. At the same time, we did not want to stop saying yes to those who offered their time to us for free, as these roles were invaluable to our work. We decided we needed to balance these placements with paid roles and started our search for funding which we could use to host paid placements.

At the same time, our Operations team started looking at our HR processes, and we looked to expand our approach to reach a wider range of candidates for our job opportunities. After advertising roles in new locations, we were successful in attracting a broader range of candidates but not in attracting candidates with the experience needed for more senior roles – something we have gone on to have more success with as our journey has continued.

We started hosting more regular work experience students from local schools near our Hackney office. We also took part in a paid for work scheme with the University of Essex for one young person.

During EcoTalent Internships' advertising and interviewing process, we learnt from the young people of further reasons why these accessible placements were needed. Repeatedly we received feedback from the young people who applied to our placements (whether they were graduates of a

² <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-two-sides-of-diversity-2.pdf>

relevant subject or not) that they had found all job vacancies in the sector were asking candidates for previous experience. It seemed, in the environmental sector, all entry level jobs were asking for some level of experience gained outside of an academic setting. That underlined the findings that only those young people who were able to support themselves through a period of unpaid work were eligible.

The sector was, and likely still is for the majority, systemically locking out young people from marginalised communities, and we came to understand the need to dismantle and rebuild these structures.

ACTIVITIES

EcoTalent initially comprised one primary activity: the paid internships, with several other activities under this umbrella. The EcoTalent programme offered Real Living Wage paid internships of 4 days per week to young people aged 18-25, aiming to address the lack of diversity within the progressive food and farming sector and the climate movement more broadly. Collaborating with a range of host organisations within these sectors, we co-created a set of exciting, challenging, and inspiring roles that would appeal to those who were passionate about the environment, community, and food, but had not had the chance to have their voices heard in this world. Added to this, the roles were designed so that having no formal work experience in the sector would not be a barrier.

Beyond the placements themselves, EcoTalent sought to explore the changes necessary in the sector to kick-start the transformation to a more inclusive, equitable sector in which young people's voices are valued, and to break the cycle of expecting young people to assimilate into the dominant workplace paradigm.

Internships: recruiting and working with hosts & young people

The internships themselves took place over a 15-week period, and the placements were hosted by a variety of organisations, including community and agroecological farms, community kitchens, and food and environment NGOs. We selected hosts based on their values and activities aligning with our mission to transition towards a more regenerative food system for the planet and its people.

Young people were recruited using a bespoke inclusive and equitable recruitment process we designed for the project. The successful candidates were employed by Feedback and seconded to work 4 days per week at their host organisation.

The roles undertaken were wide ranging, but all the roles were entry level and suitable for young people with no previous related work or educational experience. Activities at host organisations varied from placement to placement; for example, timesheets included the following activities:

- **Farms/community gardens:** planting and pruning, learning how to grow vegetables commercially following organic and agroecological principles, selling to customers, engaging with volunteers and visitors, propagation, transplanting, weeding, watering, harvesting, data collecting, working with a team, assisting in teaching workshops, looking after animals.
- **Community Kitchens:** (some community kitchens also involved growing activities as outlined above) food preparation, applying safe and hygienic food preparation working practices, working in a team, working with volunteers, managing logistics of busy food delivery (in cafés and as food deliveries/parcels particularly in response to the pandemic), public facing delivery, communication skills, admin and data entry, food inventory, marketing and social media, project evaluation.
- **Campaigning Organisations:** general admin and team support, fielding enquiries, data entry, communications – strategy, planning and delivery, creating social media content, campaign – strategy, planning and delivery, research, monitoring and evaluation, writing case studies, event planning and delivery, creating presentation materials and handouts, report production.

Interns' ongoing progress was captured through a weekly timesheet that invited reflection on the previous week. This was completed by both the intern and their manager from the host organisation.

Training and development programme (activism & employability, 1:1s)

Alongside the placements with the host organisations, all interns took part in a training and development programme run by Feedback in groups of 8-12. Through this programme, we aimed to foster a sense of environmental activism and equip the young people with employability skills that would assist them in their placement and in securing employment after the internships. We trialled a few different methods for delivering this programme and ultimately settled on a bi-weekly format; due to the pandemic spanning the majority of the project, these were delivered on Zoom.

Below is a sample of the training programme that we delivered with the final cohort of interns:

- Session 1: Introductions, course outline, values, and the search for meaningful work
- Session 2: Context on the climate crisis in relation to the food system; inspiring projects and individuals from around the world
- Session 3: Leadership training (hosted by Uprising)
- Session 4: Project management training (hosted by Uprising)
- Session 5: Individual & collective change – Alarmed to Activated workshop (Hosted by Climate Change Coaches) and campaigns training with Feedback campaigners
- Session 6: Agroecology, permaculture, and colonialism
- Session 7: Public Speaking and confidence-building workshop and reflecting on lived experience with Thanyia Moore
- Session 8: Employability skills – CVs, cover letters and mock interviews
- Session 9: Reflection and wrap up of programme

Alongside the training programme, we offered pastoral support and additional connections, both detailed below. More broadly, we sought opportunities to empower the young people, putting into practice our desire for more equitable processes in the sector and providing meaningful experiences. For example, as part of our employability/mock interview training, we invited EcoTalent interns (past and present) to create and run one of two interview panels for recruiting Feedback's newest Participatory Youth Programmes Manager (Carolina Neu, who then went on to co-deliver the training programme and PAR project). Whilst Feedback staff ran one panel to assess professional competency, ultimately young people determined which candidate was hired at Feedback.

Pastoral Support

Our pastoral support package was offered to all interns throughout their internship, in the form of a monthly 1-2-1 catch up with the EcoTalent staff team. These largely took place over Zoom, due to the pandemic, minus a few occasions when the pandemic permitted in-person meetings. These catchups provided opportunities for the young people to let us know how they were finding the internship, build on the learnings from the training programme, and talk about how these two aspects of the work interrelated. This was also designed as an opportunity for the young people to

surface any wellbeing issues, whether related to the placement or not, and to help prepare them for the search for work at the end of their internship.

We also experimented with a buddy support system, through which the interns would have a catchup conversation with another young person in between the sessions to encourage the further building of relationships outside of the sessions.

Additional connections

In addition to the group sessions and 1-2-1 support, by the end of the project we offered the young people access to the following:

- Invitation to join Feedback team meetings and other events
- Optional invite to appear on Feedback recruitment interview panels (internal staff and internships)
- Newsletter with opportunities for additional learning and employment beyond their placement

In a further iteration of the project, we would also include a group E-Council, which would, in between sessions, encourage reflection and sharing in the group and access to equality, diversity, and inclusion support groups between the young people.

Additional training, workshops, and advocacy

Alongside our work on internships, we aimed to use the profile Feedback was building through delivery of this project to explore what changes were needed to dismantle, advocate for further change, and encourage anti-oppressive practices, both with young people and within organisations. We conducted a series of talks, workshops, and trainings, and shared our learnings on an ongoing basis throughout the project. This included delivering two training sessions with Action For Conservation during 2021, who ran a large-scale training programme for young people through the Kickstart Scheme.

Our Head of Activism also delivered several talks on what we need to do to move towards a more just, racially equitable food system and environmental sector with The Soil Association, [Sustain](#) and [Coventry University's](#) Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) process³

As part of the EcoTalent project, 7 young people (former EcoTalent interns) took part in Feedback's first Participatory Action Research project set across 4 months in 2021, exploring how we might transition to a just and regenerative food system in England. Using the methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a guide, the group shed light on the following question: *Taking into consideration our individual and collective lived experience, how might we transition towards a just and regenerative food system?*

The group, who took on the role of PAR researchers looked at their individual and collective lived experience and, by connecting with their close circles (family, friends, neighbours, and others), deeply explored this question, providing ideas of where they would focus their attention in this

³ <https://recrearinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Recrear-Research-Model.pdf>

transition. This PAR methodology fostered personal and collective change alongside the creation of new knowledge and associated actions and attempted to build a strong peer group among the young people.

Collaborations with anti-oppressive organisations

From June 2020, the significant increase in conversations around racial justice and a recognition for the need to change within organisations in the sector afforded us the opportunity to build alliances with organisations working towards racial justice and other anti-oppressive groups.

Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) project

This antiracist learning programme was developed because there was an awareness from the participating organisations that their capacity to understand and reflect on what racism is, and how it manifests in their sector and organisations, needed to be increased. The programme created space over a 7-month period for participants to work towards the following learning outcomes:

- To increase awareness of the ways that current practices serve to reproduce racism and oppressive societal patterns within organisations and the broader sector.
- To increase participant's understanding of anti-oppressive practice and develop a shared understanding of the role the sector must play in addressing racism both indirectly and directly.
- To enable participants to plan and lead meaningful action within and between organisations to address racial inequity, and where identified, its intersection with other forms.
- To support staff to apply their learning to a range of areas. Strategic planning, leadership, recruitment, communications, and campaigning were prioritised.

AIM & OUTCOMES

The aim and intended outcomes agreed at the beginning of the project are outlined below; the project's success has been monitored against these factors.

Aim

In our proposal, we said we would provide paid (12-15 weeks, 4 days per week) internships for 36 young people with environmental campaigning organisations or social enterprises/charities providing alternative, more sustainable methods to our current food system.

Outcomes

In our proposal, we listed the following 7 outcomes:

1. 36 young people have gained valuable skills, training, experience and contacts that enhance their opportunities of working in the green economy
2. 36 young people have increased understanding of the climate emergency, its impacts, and the potential solutions
3. 36 young people have become ambassadors and leaders for environmental, social and cultural change
4. 36 young people have increased confidence and self-esteem
5. Organisations hosting the placements benefit from the insights, fresh perspectives, energy and enthusiasm of young people
6. Employers gain new tools, ideas and networks through which to recruit young people in future
7. Policymakers and employers gain access to case studies and policy recommendations on improving access to work for young people

Timescales

In our original proposal, we said Feedback would begin recruiting host organisations in summer 2019 and young people in autumn 2019, for the first placements to start in January 2020. We said placements would run continuously throughout the year, with regular opportunities for the young people to meet each other and a graduation event at the end of each year.

Below is a table detailing the proposed key milestones of the project, related to both project delivery and Feedback team, as they happened:

Date	Milestone/event
July 2019	Project launch
Jan 2020	Advertising of first internships & Project Manager James Turner joins team
Feb 2020	Project Director Dan Woolley departs Feedback
Apr 2020	Cohort 1 begin their internships during the COVID-19 pandemic
Jun 2020	Project Director and Head of Activism Andre Kpodonu joins Feedback, Feedback project manager Claire Burke on maternity leave
Jul 2020	Cohort 2 begin their internships, Feedback deliver first sector-wide contribution to wider anti oppressive work
Nov 2020	Cohort 3 begin their internships

Jan 2021	Participatory Youth Programmes Manager Carolina Neu joins Feedback
Feb 2021	Cohort 4 begin their internships
Apr 2021	Feedback apply for the government Kickstart scheme
Jun 2021	Participatory Action Research (PAR) project begins
June 2021	AOP project starts
Nov 2021	PAR researchers and Feedback delivery team deliver event at COP26 in Glasgow
Dec 2021	Cohort 5 recruited and begin internships, Carolina Neu leaves Feedback, project delivery ends
Dec 2021	AOP Project Concludes

Achieving Impact: our Theory of Change

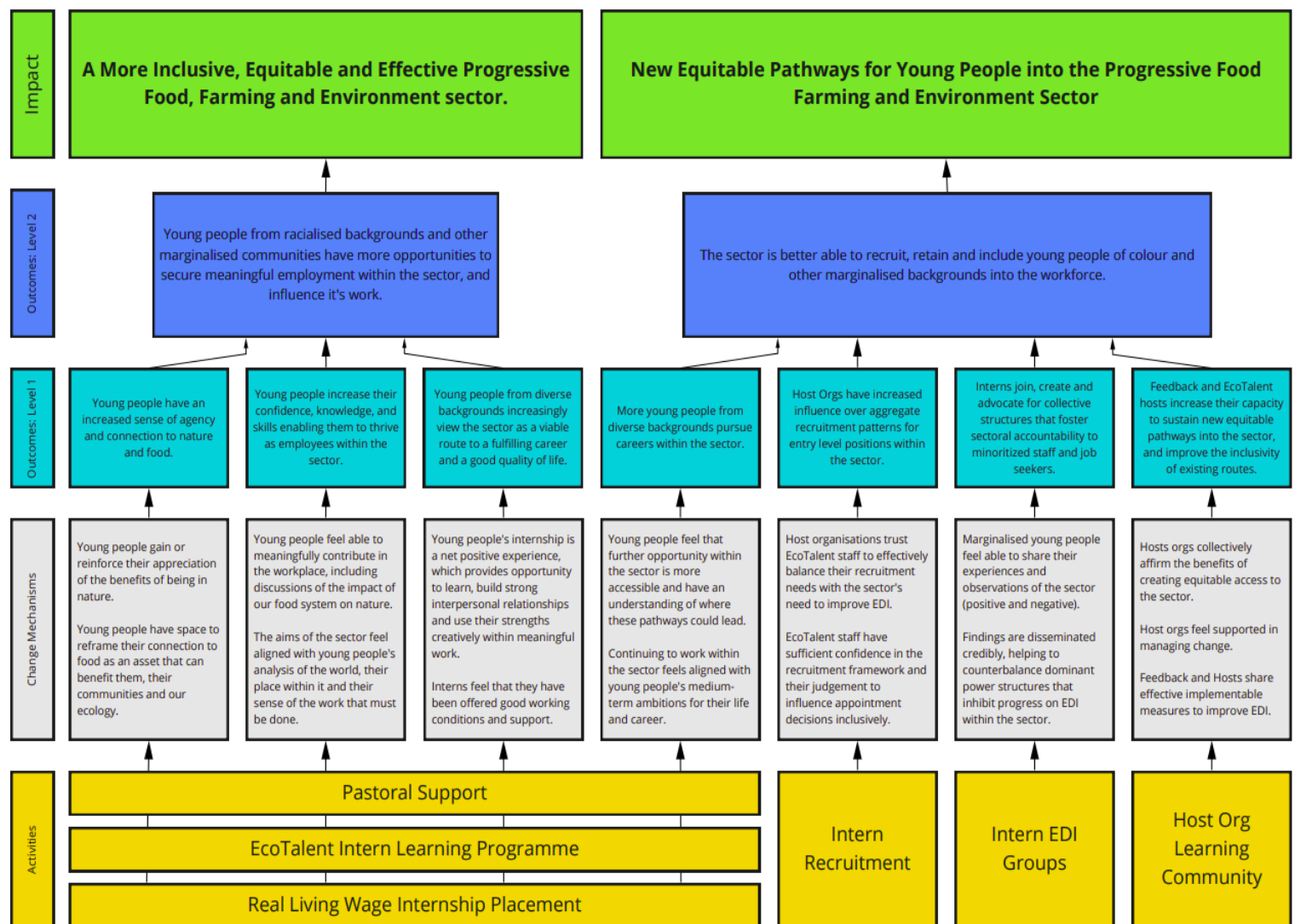
The following theory of change table was created at the beginning of the project:

Activities / Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36 young people (YPs) will undertake paid internships with either environmental campaigning organisations or social enterprises/charities providing alternative, more sustainable methods to our current food system. 36 YPs will receive external leadership training. 36 YPs will receive further external training relevant to their placement: for example, where placements focus on the delivery of sustainable food, the YP may receive accredited Level 2 Food Hygiene training. Each YP will attend workshops and discussion groups focused on key environmental issues and mitigating actions Each YP will create 1-2 pieces of content (e.g. blogs or videos) and receive professional help in disseminating these, targeting their peer groups, so as to maximise reach Each YP will deliver peer-to-peer learning sessions Each YPs will receive training and support in CV/job application writing/interview skills through dedicated sessions. Feedback will publish a final report including a set of policy recommendations to increase pathways to employment for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YPs have gained valuable skills, training, experience and contacts that enhance their opportunities of working in the green economy YPs have increased understanding of the climate emergency, its impacts, and the potential solutions YPs have become ambassadors and leaders for environmental, social and cultural change YPs increase confidence and self-esteem Organisations hosting the placements benefit from the insights, fresh perspectives, energy and enthusiasm of YPs Employers gain new tools, ideas and networks through which to recruit YPs in future Policymakers and employers gain access to case studies and policy recommendations on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YPs have improved access to employment in the green economy The environment sector is able to recruit from a workforce with greater diversity Pro-environmental actions and messaging reach, and resonate with, a wider and more diverse audience Paid internship roles are made more widely available, both within the green economy and beyond, supported by progressive policies and forward-thinking organisations Unpaid internships are disincentivised through policy and awareness-raising; regulation is improved to ensure remaining unpaid internships adhere to fairness, equal opportunities and best practice.

YPs	improving access to work for YPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YPs become the vanguard of the Green New Deal
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Changes to our theory of change

As the project developed, we worked on developing a new Theory of Change model, which would consider the learnings from the first half of the project delivery. This advanced model would enable us to continue moving towards the project outcomes and impacts as well as towards a wider vision of change beyond the project as a legacy. This includes a situation analysis based on our more in-depth knowledge of the barriers to accessing work in the environmental/food sector for people from marginalised communities.



RESULTS

Activities and outputs

- 46 paid placements - 40 completed, 5 in progress, and one remaining unfinished (35 young people engaged)
- 20 host organisations hosted placements
- 401 applicants for our various EcoTalent positions
- 111 interviews with young people conducted
- 4 iterations of the EcoTalent training programme delivered, with a 5th scheduled for 2022
- 4 additional training workshops delivered
- 4 workshops delivered by PAR researchers
- 1 Anti-oppressive practice group convened with 8 organisations participating
- 2 talks on anti-oppressive work delivered by Feedback

Activities

We have outlined some of the results of the key activities below, especially those which don't speak directly to specific outcomes (or are too broad), but still require special attention. We have included some information on demographic data, as well as different processes we undertook.

Recruitment process

We spent a significant amount of time planning the recruitment process, seeking advice, both legal and from other innovative recruitment processes, on how to ensure we weren't excluding people from the process before they'd even applied. The focus on lived experience and passion for the role seemed to resonate well with the applicants, with one successful applicant reflecting on the process later by saying *"I passed through the interview stage which was unique and helpful in its own way because it was relaxed...looking for both passion and skill when asking questions"*.

Our most significant departure from standard recruitment practices was to simply remove the requirement to submit CVs and cover letters to apply for roles, and as such, we saw a dramatic shift in the number and types of applications we received.

Initially, we experienced very high numbers of applications for our internships, with the first two receiving 62 and 77 applications respectively for two single roles. This was because the two roles, advertised on the Feedback website, were picked up by recruitment websites Indeed and Jooble without our permission. All candidates applying through these websites submitted their CVs despite us not asking for them; many were also ineligible based either on age or their qualifications, as many had significant work experience. After this initial frustration, we were able to opt for our preferred option of a simple online application form, which asks applicants to answer broad, uncomplicated questions about their lived experience, and allowed us to understand where their passions may lie. We also asked a question about their experience of barriers to paid employment, giving them an opportunity to share their experience of exclusion. Another effective innovation was our invitation for applicants to submit an audio/video recording of them answering the questions, thereby not disadvantaging someone who may not be skilled in writing.

Demographic data

Of the 401 applications we received in total, 97 applicants voluntarily submitted demographic data through a voluntary equality and diversity form. Whilst this number is less than we hoped, this was somewhat skewed by 139 of these applications coming from those first two roles, which did not offer the option of filling in the equality and diversity monitoring form. Of the 262 applicants who were offered the opportunity to fill in the form, 37% responded.

Of applicants surveyed:

- Gender: 59% identified as women, 30% as male and 4% non-binary
- Ethnic background: 25% identified as a person of colour
- 7.5% identified as having a disability

Whilst the statistics around gender broadly reflect the trends within the environmental sector, the figures around ethnicity are in stark contrast to the 96.9% White British demographic makeup as of 2017⁴. These statistics definitely suggest an encouraging trajectory of increased participation from BPoC young people, but not as many as we hoped. One possibility as to why we may have received a greater number of BPoC applicants is through explicitly addressing equity, diversity, and inclusivity in our job applications. For all roles, we stated: *These placements are open to everyone, regardless of experience or background. We acknowledge that the environmental sector is less open to young people from under-represented backgrounds and we're committed to doing what we can to correct this. We especially want to hear from you if you feel that opportunities like this are less available to you, or if you feel overlooked by mainstream institutions.*

Comparing these results to demographic data we collected from the 30 young people who went on to undertake the EcoTalent internships shows some interesting results. Our intern demographic data is as follows:

- Gender: 57% identified as women, 37% as male and 6% as non-binary
- Ethnic background: 53% identified as a person of colour
- Disability: 6.7% identified as having a disability
- Neurodivergence: 17% of our interns identified as neurodiverse

It is with regret that we didn't specifically ask people at the application stage to share whether they identified as neurotypical or neurodiverse. Working with neurodiverse young people became a key aspect of the project that emerged in the second half, so it would have been useful to have collected this data initially. It is possible that we attracted more neurodiverse people to the roles due to focusing on creating a safe, encouraging environment from application stage onwards, after we came to understand the complex barriers and discrimination many neurodiverse people face. We were able to, in most cases, reassure them that we and the host organisations were willing and able to make reasonable adjustments to ensure they had a safe working environment in which they could flourish. We tried to give this sense early on in the process by inviting applicants (both at application and interview stage) to share any barriers they may have felt to accessing work, by asking the following question: *Can you tell us about barriers you feel you face in securing employment? If you were offered the role, what would you want to prove to the world, and yourself? This might be as a result of your own confidence, or you might feel it's down to wider problems like discrimination.*

⁴ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-two-sides-of-diversity-2.pdf>

This approach may also be an explanation for the encouraging 53% of our interns identifying as a person of colour - one of the most successful results of the project, but also a part that requires deeper analysis. Like disabled people or people who are neurodivergent, many application processes make young people from BPoC backgrounds feel the need to hide these aspects of themselves, due to experiences of structural inequality.

Our selection criteria also encouraged young people, who had less education or work experience than is normally expected for roles in the environment and food sectors, to draw upon their lived experience and passions, rather than a competency-based approach. We feel this helped young people who might have self-disqualified due to a lack of confidence, which is often related to how people from their background are perceived and treated in the sector.

Finally, working with young people of colour became a high priority for us throughout the project, so it may be that the increase in the number of people engaged from these backgrounds was a result of the targeted advertising that we undertook, of which more detail is outlined below.

Advertising internships

Whilst we are confident that our targeted advertising for the internships had a positive impact on the number of people from our target demographic of people from backgrounds of marginalisation, our intention was always to try to build deeper relationships with youth and community organisations. We understood that this was an area where Feedback had little experience and knew how important this was to ensure that representatives of youth and community organisations can confidently advocate for the internship opportunities on our behalf. Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic left in-person work of this kind impossible throughout much of the project, which prevented us from building these relationships; we had to rely on our targeted advertising taking place mostly online, through sharing social media posts with social and racial justice organisations, for example. This is where our lack of trusted existing relationships with youth and community organisations was felt more keenly.

Another noteworthy result was that, where host organisations were embedded more significantly in their communities, their advertising helped us to attract the target groups to apply to the roles. This underlines the importance of having a place-based, community centred approach.

We experimented with new in-person strategies, within COVID restrictions, to reach a wider range of young people. One notable instance was the introduction of a 'street team' - a group of young people who helped us advertise upcoming internships at a local Enfield farm with free plants and cake given away, alongside beatboxing and music. Whilst this did not result in any applications from young people we met that day, we were impressed by one of young people we recruited to assist us, that they ended up succeeding in the role they had decided to apply for.

Personnel changes

At various stages throughout the project, we had significant staff changes which created a number of challenges. January 2020 saw Senior Project Manager (and key member of the From Farm to Fork delivery team) James Turner join the EcoTalent delivery team. In February 2020, shortly after the delivery stage commenced, both Project Director and Project Coordinator left Feedback. The

already under-resourced team was reduced further when the Project Manager went on maternity leave in August 2020.

The team was then strengthened in August 2020 through the recruitment of a new role of Head of Activism, filled by Andre Kpodonu, who helped shift the direction of the project to align our work more explicitly with social justice organisations. Andre has over a decade of experience directing award-winning youth-led programmes tackling domestic violence, the refugee crisis, racism in the education system and serious youth violence, and youth unemployment. This helped us enter a period of stability, with project delivery and administrative support from Fundraising Coordinator Megan Romania and Operations and Finance Coordinator Azalea Harley before Claire returned from maternity leave at the end of April 2021. We also recruited Carolina Neu, our participatory Youth Programmes Manager in January 2021, who worked closely with James on the internship scheme, as well as in planning and delivering the Participatory Action Research project.

DWP collaboration

After getting off to a fantastic start with the project, the collaboration with the DWP to offer Kickstart internship roles seemed like an excellent way to extend the length of both internships and the project as a whole, but the organisational and bureaucratic difficulties we experienced throughout resulted in a frustrating experience.

There were numerous delays caused by an overly bureaucratic process, with every single placement to be advertised through Kickstart having significant yet avoidable challenges. On one occasion, we missed the opportunity to work with an inspiring young person due to a long list of clerical errors, meaning the young person was unable to apply for the job despite being assured that the job was viewable on their online platform. They subsequently found a placement with another organisation elsewhere. The frustrations were also felt by the young people. When young people attended Job Centre arranged interviews, the young people had often been briefed about the wrong job role, meaning they were insufficiently prepared through no fault of their own.

We are pleased that our final 5 placements will go ahead throughout 2022, despite them completing beyond the Our Bright Future deadline – this is only possible due to the Kickstart scheme, though we regret the scheme has not enabled us to create as many opportunities for young people as we initially envisioned.

On reflection, the size of the DWP, their unwieldy organisational structure and the attempted scope of their Kickstart scheme was a fairly significant contribution to its inability to meet its ambitious targets. Their organisational structure sits in contrast to the small-scale, community-embedded initiatives that we feel are important for young people to be able to flourish. As of November 2021, the National Audit Office report found that while the employment rate for young Black people is 2-4 times that of young white people, they account for just 8% of Kickstart participants. Only just over 1% of Kickstart starts are disabled.⁵

PAR Project

⁵ <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/news/response-to-national-audit-offices-kickstart-report/>

We have referred to the PAR project in various places below to illustrate how it contributed to meeting our specific outcomes, but given the significant role it played in the project throughout 2021, further exploration is outlined here.

The PAR group went through a personal and collective change as they created the knowledge and associated actions from the process. Feedback aims to build upon this knowledge to inform future youth-led campaigns and projects, as well as disseminate the results more widely in the sector.

From the research process, four themes for youth-led action were identified:

1. Information, Knowledge, Education
2. Power to the people
3. One Pot Community – Food and Community Cooperative
4. Advocating for a neurodivergent community in the food sector

The actions planned and developed by the PAR researchers were as follows:

Information, Knowledge and Education

An animation, coordinated by one of the PAR researchers, which was designed to inform people about the quality of produce at supermarkets, the issues of affordability of (and access to) organic produce, and the benefit that it would have on the environment. The animation leaves the viewer with the question of what they might do in this dilemma.

A **poem/video** was written by one of the researchers, taking their research survey responses and making a collage type poem, and then inviting the PAR researchers and her friends to record excerpts of the poem for the video.

From One Pot Community

Throughout the process, one of the participants developed his idea of a community and food cooperative. Through examining his personal life and interviewing relatives, he devised a manifesto that mentioned what this cooperative would look like. This was accompanied by a drawing. The manifest is featured in Appendix 3.

From Advocating for a neurodivergent community

From one of our neurodiverse participants, what came out was very personal, and they demonstrated enormous courage in writing their personal story of a traumatic experience on her placement, as well as an open letter to neurotypical society. The aim was to highlight oppressive behaviours and advocate for a chance to prevent them from happening to others. They first shared it with Feedback staff, then with the research group, and then at the PAR COP26 event.

COP26 Event

In November 2020, four of the researchers, along with two Feedback staff members, attended the COP26 conference in Glasgow. During the conference, the researchers delivered a 2-hour event to various stakeholders in the sector, outlining the PAR process, their discoveries and advocating for more participatory research processes related to the food system.

The event was very well received by those in attendance and those who have since viewed it. A more developed version of the event was delivered online as part of the Oxford Real Farming Conference in January 2022

Reflections

One key aspect of this work that requires further analysis is that the two neurodivergent participants also identified as white, and almost all of those who identified as people of colour had also accessed higher education. In our selection of future candidates, we need to ensure that we aren't simply replicating inequality within marginalised identities.

A further learning is that the biggest barrier in having stronger and closer relationships between researchers was the virtual setting (using Zoom). On the rare occasions where participants were in the space together face-to-face, the group dynamics were fantastic. A longer in-person process could have helped us to work through the research topics in a more cohesive fashion, linking the 4 topics which were explored into a wider overarching campaign.

Overall, this PAR process (Feedback's first) and visit to COP26 in Glasgow felt like a big step in the right direction regarding our participatory work with young people and is something we are hugely proud of. Not only have the researchers now delivered powerful events at two public events aimed at the progressive food and farming sector and the COP26 delegates, but we are also planning to collaborate with many of them further, to seek funding for young people-led projects to continue in their communities.

AOP Project

This antiracist learning programme was developed because there was an awareness from the participating organisations that their capacity to understand and reflect on what racism is, and how it manifests in their sector and organisations needed to be increased. The programme created space over a seven-month period for participants to work towards the following learning outcomes:

- To increase awareness of the ways current practises serve to reproduce racism and oppressive societal patterns within organisations and the broader sector.
- To increase participant's understanding of anti-oppressive practice and develop a shared understanding of the role the sector must play in addressing racism both indirectly and directly.
- To enable participants to plan and lead meaningful action within and between organisations to address racial inequity, and where identified, its intersection with other forms.
- To support staff to apply their learning to a range of areas. Strategic planning and leadership, recruitment, and communications and campaigning, were prioritised.

The process was run by two experienced facilitators, Natalie Lartey and Mary Ann Clements, who Feedback and the broader partnership commissioned through a competitive call for proposals. In the interest of brevity, the full report, outcomes, and recommendations from this project are attached in the appendices of this report.

Outcomes

1. 36 young people have gained valuable skills, training, experience and contacts that enhance their opportunities of working in the green economy

When asked what the most important aspect of their internship was, one intern replied *“Getting to know about different experiences and journeys to you, even if they are from different areas, cultures, and how they operate in the environmental space. I noticed how we overlap. We are helping different people with the same goal”*

A key element of achieving our overarching goal of transforming the food and environment sector was to offer opportunities to young people who had been excluded from paid work opportunities. We understood however from the outset, that despite the talents that these young people would bring to a 15-week work placement, for the programme to have a successful anti-oppressive approach, creating a nurturing, nourishing learning environment would be key. As such, achieving this outcome in a meaningful way felt extremely important to us. We understood that delivering additional training, 1-1 support and access to wider networks would be key to building a better experience in which the young people feel a sense of belonging in their placements and the wider sector, and increase their chances of remaining in the sector.

We felt the best way to measure the success of this outcome was based on the interns’ progress during and after their internships, including their search for work post internship. Of those interviewed at the end of the programme, 82% had secured work, and 58% were working in related employment. They all stated that they did not think they would have been able to secure these roles without having completed their EcoTalent internship.

In addition to the above interview process, some interns got the opportunity to devise questions and be on an interview panel to recruit our Participatory Youth Programmes Manager at the end of 2020, a unique experience in building interview skills to be ‘on the other side of the table’. All our interns gained valuable skills training, experience, and contacts during their placements. Statistics from our exit interviews show that two thirds of our interns consider the skills they gained as the most satisfying thing about undertaking their internship; other popular answers were ‘meeting new people’ and ‘the rewarding nature of the work’.

The training and development programme successfully allowed the young people to build lasting relationships with each other, bonding with the others in their cohort, although there were limitations to this due to pandemic-induced remote working. The training programme took this into consideration with the third and fourth iterations, and had this aspect factored more strongly into the design, with more group exercises designed to help them connect. For those who participated in the PAR project, very strong relationships were formed, helped by the fact that occasional in-person work became possible.

On the other hand, the length of the internship was in some cases considered a limiting factor in the amount that a young person could develop skills and meaningful experiences that would help them progress in the sector. Not only does the relatively short length of the placements somewhat limit the potential benefits, but in some cases, this can create a barrier that stops young people from being able to participate. In one case, a fantastic young person we were very much hoping to work with pulled out just before their interview, saying in an email: *“I did not see in the original description that the role was only for 12-15 weeks, this is my mistake for not reading it*

multiple times to check. I have just read the full job description you attached and seen this detail, I am unsure I could take on this role with the insecurity financially of potentially no having employment to follow since I rent accommodation, I am trying to find a role which is more secure or has follow up opportunities."

This lack of stability is a difficult thing to manage with a short-term internship, but it is important to recognise how this relatively short-term contract can contribute to uncertainty for young people. The above quote is the only person who told us that they experienced this as an insurmountable barrier, so it stands to reason that there are many other young people out there who didn't apply because of this. Several of the interns also said that they wished that the internships were longer, as they felt they were only just beginning to feel settled in their placements. Even in some of the most glowing feedback, this theme appears: *"As hard as it is to believe – there is nothing I would change. It was one of the best experiences I've had educationally and all-round. I only wish I could have done it for longer. 6 months would have been more ideal, 3 months went by so quickly."* One of the other interns also suggested that if they could change something they would *"Make it longer [and have the] opportunity to transfer between different hosts and do and learn more."*

Our decision to align the project with the Government Kickstart Scheme was, in part, inspired by this feedback and the Government's offer of funding for 6-month placements. As described above, this resulted in various issues, but we remain confident that, to maximise the skills, training, experience, and contacts that young people can access, a longer placement is ideal.

2. 36 young people have increased understanding of the climate emergency, its impacts, and the potential solutions

When asked in their exit interview if they had learned about the environmental crisis during their internship, one intern said: *"Definitely! Prior to starting the internship, coming from an agricultural University background, I didn't know much about organic farming, I had only looked at it in a negative way as I had been taught that it would not produce large yields. Growing Communities helped me to unlearn this and to relearn that nature is able to provide on its own. Before starting the internship, I would have pumped the ground with chemical fertilisers and pesticides to grow stuff, but now I know this isn't necessary. I also learnt about community growing and how local supply chains work and why it is good to support them."*

Ensuring that people we work with gain knowledge about the environmental crisis, especially in relation to the contribution of the food system, has always been an important mission of Feedback - this project was no different. Not only because the food system is not commonly considered as a key contributor to climate change, but also because through food lies an opportunity for people to take practical action on issues which can feel overwhelming, and beyond the influence of ordinary people. Indeed, one of the key findings of the PAR project was that many people are unable to make changes to their lifestyle and eating habits which benefit the environment due to lack of knowledge.

We are pleased to say that of the interns interviewed at the end of the programme, when asked to reflect on the statement *"I learned about the environmental crisis during my internship"*, the following statistics emerged:

- 82.5% agree (42.5 strongly agree, 40% agree)

- 7.5% unsure
- 10% disagree

These results are very encouraging, and we are glad that the learning environments we created were well received. When choosing our host organisations, we also considered the host's likelihood to be able to provide on-the-job training on this subject during the course of the internship. For the most part, this worked out well, with interns reporting that their internship environment was encouraging. However, some hosts who are directly engaging in practical action to fight climate change (such as organic farms or community kitchens) were unable to provide more focused learning on the subject beyond the practical work. Whilst this has significant benefits and accounts for different learning styles, it was generally due to the significant workloads and pandemic-induced chaotic environments that organisations and interns faced, and in some cases, this caused the internships to feel more like a more standard job role.

Feedback's workshops on the environmental crisis had to cater for the different levels of existing knowledge on the subject. Our main aim was to embed learning in the values of our interns, so we looked to identify values first and then explore the topic through this lens. As a lot of the interns had only a rudimentary knowledge of the crisis, it was important that we started at the beginning, so to speak. For those with pre-existing knowledge who might have found this repetitive, we hoped that exploring these issues with their values in mind might give them a focused space in which to reconsider any existing knowledge; creating a safe space where exploration of difficult feelings related to climate change can be very powerful even for those with high levels of technical knowledge. One intern spoke to this when they said in their interview, *"I did learn about the food system and the environmental crisis...and in ways that definitely linked in with the issues being tackled in my internship placement. I appreciated the group setting and that we were learning about difficult topics together"*.

Of those who selected 'disagree', they did indeed start the course with a good level of knowledge on the subject already. They said: *"[The internship] deepened my knowledge but [I was] seeing people who did not have prior knowledge learn a lot. I could see how others gained new knowledge"*. This illustrates the need to ensure that all of the young people, regardless of how much they know at the start of the internship, have that chance to build further connections that help them to learn on a level which is feels useful to them.

3. 36 young people have become ambassadors and leaders for environmental, social and cultural change

"I was able to conduct research and present my findings to COP26 which made me feel empowered and it showed that as a team, we are actively making a difference and being heard. I now stand up for myself when I feel my rights have been violated. I can see that I deserve respect from the people around me and I fight for it now."

As our project progressed, the importance of fostering opportunities for young people to advocate for change and be ambassadors became clear. The increased attention on systemic racism and social inequality exacerbated by COVID-19 further underlined the need for young people's voices to be heard on matters that affected them. In relation to this outcome, the most significant change took place in how the young people engaged with their immediate peer group and family. We

asked the young people at the end of the programme if they agreed with the statement *'I have found myself talking to my family and friends about environmental, social or cultural change more since my internship'*. The following responses were recorded:

- 80% agree (50% strongly, 30% agree)
- 20% unsure

We are delighted to see such an encouraging trend in interns sharing their experiences with more confidence. There is a direct and important correlation between outcome 3 and outcomes 1, 2 and 4, which directly influence and feed into outcome 3. It stands to reason that if young people feel they have accumulated valuable skills and knowledge and have increased their confidence and self-esteem, they will feel more capable of sharing their learning and passions with their wider community and advocate for change.

Whilst the responses to the above question is a good indicator of our success in achieving this outcome, it doesn't allow us to capture the wider picture about more widespread advocacy and ambassadorial work that may be taking place in the lives of the young people. We asked whether they agreed with the statement *"I have taken part in action aimed at government, policy, or people in positions of power with regards to environmental, social or cultural change more since my internship?"* and we received the following responses:

- 47.5% agree (25% strongly, 22.5% agree)
- 15% disagree,
- 10% Strongly disagree

These statistics correlate with this understanding that conducting wider advocacy work takes time, much longer than having conversations with friends and family members. When designing the training programme and the PAR process, we took this into account, and dedicated plenty of staff resources to supporting any young people who had ambitions to do advocacy work beyond their internship. We feel that the intentional creation of spaces to help young people to collectively process difficult emotions relating to climate change and social issues (such as grief and anxiety) is a powerful way to encourage advocacy activity. This approach is alarmingly absent in the professional environmental sector and influenced our decision to work with Climate Change Coaches to deliver their 'Alarmed to Activated' workshop; we explicitly intended to help the young people to move through the challenging feelings and combat the commonly experienced disengagement around climate and social issues. This work would have been much more successful had it taken place in-person, but we are pleased we managed to engender a level of self-reflection that was quite unfamiliar for some of the young people. We would hope to be able to offer further spaces to support young people in this journey in future iterations of the project.

For the 7 young people that participated in the PAR process, it was, without doubt, the activity which most enabled them to take up roles as ambassadors and advocate for change. The process itself not only more deeply explored their own relationship to some of the issues we face as a society, but through power and community mapping exercises, they were able to further understand where they could be most influential in advocating for change. The visit to Glasgow for the COP26 conference gave the young people real-life experience in speaking onstage about issues that were important to them and has since resulted in a further online workshop at the Oxford Real Farming Conference and an interview on the popular podcast Farmerama.

Another key impact of the PAR process in relation to this outcome is how the researchers were able to educate and influence each other by sharing their lived experiences and collectively exploring the issues relevant to them. One researcher said in their fortnightly timesheet that *“within the last two weeks I learnt more about ableism and some similarities with racism that is evident in modern society and the food system”*. This is a compelling finding, and underlines not only the importance of an intersectional lens in approaching social change work, but also demonstrates the need for sustained group processes when building peer-to-peer networks. As one intern put it, *“EcoTalent has been a great gathering place for people to share their experiences and find new ways to get these voices out and be heard by talking with each other and forming friendships and strengthening each other’s resolve”*.

Finally, the legacy of advocacy work among our young people is looking exciting and has the potential to flourish in the coming year. The following activities are in the pipeline:

- We are awaiting the outcome of a funding application which, if successful, will allow us to support:
 - A food education project with young Black men in Hackney, led by one of our PAR researchers
 - Further exploration and some setup costs of the One Pot Community Food Manifesto
- One of our neurodiverse interns is waiting to hear about the outcome of a job application to deliver workshops on autism.

4. 36 young people increase confidence and self-esteem

“Taking part in EcoTalent has been a life changing experience for me both professionally and personally. Fresh out of University I had graduated in the middle of the pandemic, finding jobs increasingly difficult. I had a self-confidence issue which I had highlighted early in my EcoTalent programme to James and Carolina who were working with us in helping to cultivate confidence, experience and a passion for the environment. I strongly believe that EcoTalent has helped me with confidence because I was able to give my own opinions, share ideas and feel as though I was being heard.”

The above quote illustrates the potential and the possibilities that can be unlocked for young people if they are given an opportunity to flourish. By successfully applying for the roles, the young people were already experiencing a significant boost in their confidence and self-esteem, with many appreciating how rare paid opportunities like those on this scheme are. Furthermore, a large part of the training programme and 1-1 support we offered was explicitly designed to support young people to come to understand where their talents lie, find their voice and pursue their passions. It was apparent that low levels of self-confidence and ‘impostor syndrome’ were common among the young people we were working with, so we were pleased when asked if they agree with the statement *“Taking part in EcoTalent increased my confidence”*; **100% agreed (45% strongly agree 55% agree)**.

It also felt important to address confidence and self-esteem specifically in the training programme, given how common issues around this seemed to be. We took an innovative approach to working on confidence and self-esteem in the sessions, hiring an external facilitator who is a stand-up comedian and writer to host a session. One of the interns spoke about how this session *“helped me with my confidence by bringing a public speaker coach into one of our EcoTalent sessions where I*

was able to talk about my difficulties when it comes to public speaking and learn how to improve on how to speak confidently and get my ideas across". The facilitator is also a person of colour, and we feel this may have contributed.

The host organisations can, for the most part, take significant credit for supporting the confidence and self-esteem increases in the young people. One young person illustrated how the manager at their host organisation taking an active role in their learning helped a lot in this regard: *"My internship enabled me to work on a variety of tasks which built my confidence in trying new things and asking for help when I needed it. My manager also made an effort to ask what areas I was interested in and wanted to improve on (one of which was public speaking) and she created opportunities for me to work on these areas which increased my confidence with them especially in a more professional context."*

In an example of different learning styles, some of the young people who were placed on farms found the independent work, as opposed to connections with other groups of young people, as something that helped with confidence. One said: *"I think being given the opportunity to work independently. They leave you in a field to get on with it, it's a good way to develop skills and secure belief in skills I already have"*. This approach certainly wouldn't work with all people.

We had slightly different results when it came to the statement '*Taking part in EcoTalent increased my self-esteem*' with those interviewed responding as below:

- 69.2% agree (38.1% strongly agree, 31.1% agree)
- 26.1% unsure
- 4.7% disagree

The question of self-esteem seemed to be a more challenging one for many of the young people. It should be pointed out that people from marginalised communities may be more likely to experience low self-esteem: *When I presented my Autism training workshop to my colleagues. I was extremely nervous, and I mucked up a little bit in the middle, but ultimately it gave me the strength and courage to present in the future and it also showed me that it's okay to mess up. Since then, I have conducted interviews for another charity and I have done other presenting work.*

The above quote comes from one of our interns who left their placement on the farm they were working on after a traumatic experience with the farm manager relating to the young person's autism. In this case, we were able to offer them the opportunity to complete their internship with Feedback, and their work focussed on developing training materials around autism, with the hope that they could prevent similar incidents occurring. We are delighted that we managed to facilitate an experience that ended up being very beneficial, but a key element in this was the significant support that we were able to offer. It was only through directing a lot of team resources to supporting this young person that they were able to flourish and develop their self-esteem. Were we not in a position to offer this role at Feedback, the young person would have likely left the programme with their confidence and self-esteem negatively impacted.

Unfortunately, not in every case did the interns come away with an increase in their self-esteem. In the one instance where an intern didn't complete their placement, their relationship with their host was a significant contributing factor to them not finishing their placement, but also to them experiencing a big dip in self-esteem. When interviewed about the issues they had at their host

organisation, they said *“at the time, during week 3-4, my manager pulled me aside and made some harsh comments about my work rate, and this had a big effect on my self-esteem - For 3-4 months I didn’t think I was good enough to participate in any form of work or education.”*

The quote above demonstrates a rare instance in which the host organisation failed in their duty to provide a nurturing, supportive environment for a young person. The young person in question went into their internship experiencing challenges with their mental health, and unfortunately their experience with their host initially exacerbated these challenges. They have since pointed out that their confidence has increased through their experience of standing up for themselves, but it cannot be ignored that this intervention negatively affected the self-esteem of this young person.

Feedback’s relative inexperience with more in-depth, long-term work with young people from marginalised communities was keenly felt. Our initial plan to pair this young person with another at their placement fell through. Further reflection on this is detailed below in the exploration of outcome 6, but it’s important to point out here that the physical distance necessitated by both the pandemic and not working with the young people day-to-day created challenges in Feedback’s ability to identify issues and act swiftly. This is a key lesson in relation to the potential pitfalls of how to coordinate placements where young people are working with a third party. We have outlined some recommendations at the end of this document, but it feels important to immediately capture some actions that should be taken to ensure that any wellbeing issues are captured early and do not affect their long-term self-esteem:

- Creating a space where a young person feels comfortable sharing the status of their mental health during induction, to be able to offer necessary support
- Ensure that young people are not working alone where possible, especially in unfamiliar environments. Having groups of 2 or more interns increases the chances of a supportive environment, or making it explicit that a support worker may be able to be arranged
- Ensure that organisations hosting internships are willing to spend time nurturing those who have no experience in the field they are entering and will not have unreasonably high expectations.
- Ensure that host organisations are sensitive to the needs of young people, and willing to make reasonable adjustments in line with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

Overall, we are really happy with the increases in self-esteem and confidence that have been reported but acknowledge the complexities that young people face in the world today, and that low self-esteem is very common. Programmes designed to help young people through employment pathways need to ensure that they are allocating enough team resources to the support and mentoring of young people and tackling these issues of confidence and self-esteem head on.

5. Organisations hosting the placements benefit from the insights, fresh perspectives, energy and enthusiasm of young people

Whilst we haven’t collected any quantitative data related to this outcome, the positivity with which the young people were received, and the glowing reviews we have received related to the programme speak for themselves. In response to the question *“How, if at all, did your organisation benefit from the insights, fresh perspectives, energy and enthusiasm of the EcoTalent intern/s you hosted?”* we received a broad range of responses, some of which are outlined below:

“It was great to have someone so new to sustainability join the team, especially someone who hadn’t studied science, geography etc. At the time of hosting the internship we didn’t have an entry level role, so it was very rewarding for us to see the change in our intern throughout the placement but also for us to learn about the barriers to engaging with sustainability at an entry level. Our intern was shy to start with but really grew in confidence and by the end was providing lots of fantastic ideas.” This particular quote speaks to a lot of the key areas that the project hoped to explore, by encouraging hosts to learn about the barriers that young people experienced and the value in different skillsets and experiences.

Another host was able to come good on their intention to continue employing their intern, saying *“the intern we recruited was fantastic and made really valuable contributions to our organisation. We were so impressed with our intern, that we have now re-recruited her in a part-time role”*. Hosts were also able to experience the benefits that young people brought beyond traditional skill sets, with one host saying the intern *“brought a great deal of energy and enthusiasm to the role and to our organisation. It’s difficult to say precisely “how” she has done this, but we’ve definitely felt the positive impact of her joining the team”*.

These findings show that there is a lot of willingness and readiness within the sector to nurture young people through paid work and benefit from their perspectives, but financial and capacity constraints often create too much of a barrier for organisations to undergo this work without schemes like EcoTalent to support them. It is the uniqueness of this particular project which has helped start many organisations on this journey.

Alongside these notable successes, we have had some challenging situations to manage with regards to the internships. In some cases, hosts felt unable or unwilling to provide the extra support that they perceived a particular young person might need when starting an internship, and therefore were hoping to employ a more qualified candidate for a role, in opposition to the aims of the programme. On some occasions, this caused a small amount of tension between hosts and Feedback. Further communication in the early stages of the partnership to more clearly outline expectations would help to alleviate any potential issues like this in future.

There was another unfortunate case where a host was unwilling to offer female muslim candidate an opportunity to interview for a role, as their religious belief prevented them from attending the initial interview with a man present. This host missed out on a potential opportunity to engage with a community they had otherwise not successfully worked with through the perspective this young person could have brought. Finally, there were some occasions where there were difficulties around the pay that young people were receiving whilst working alongside experienced unpaid volunteers. Our position remains that young people should be paid at a salary at least in line with the Living Wage Foundation’s Real Living wage, to give them a chance of being able to meet their basic needs whilst pursuing meaningful work in the sector.

6. Employers gain new tools, ideas and networks through which to recruit young people in future

“Hosting Ecotalent [interns] was a great experience in general and served as a bit of a pilot that we could learn from, helping in our longer terms plans to hopefully offer another trainee position at

the farm specifically for people who are completely new to growing/young people/with the aim of increasing diversity in farming.”

We are immensely proud of the equitable and inclusive recruitment process that we devised through this programme. Not only have many of the young people who applied for internships told us that it was the best and most welcoming process they have engaged with, but almost all of the hosts cited it as the most influential and impressive part of the process for them, in terms of the practical steps they could take for future processes.

The ideas we explored throughout the programme which were cited by hosts as the most influential were:

- The value of having entry level positions and paid internships
- Being open to recruiting candidates who are not the most well qualified, experienced and may not meet conventional interview selection metrics.
- Valuing other credentials such as lived experience of marginalisation and passion for the role over professional experience
- Accepting video or audio applications
- Going out of our way to make interviewees comfortable, acknowledging the potential for bias in recruitment processes and sending interview questions to them in advance of the interview.

The timing of the Government Kickstart Scheme has been such that many of the organisations who hosted EcoTalent interns have since taken on their own Kickstart placements, attributing the EcoTalent scheme as their first step on this road. One host said of the programme: *“It has been part of a number of ways we have been looking at recruitment, from how we make our commitment to diversity clear in our job ads, to how we conduct interviews and how we have some more structured career support for staff. I think it has given us some confidence to now recruit a Kickstart post”.*

There were also some reflections from hosts on the difficulties of balancing the support needs of a young person whilst also balancing their deliverables. As one host put it: *“At the end of the internship, I gave feedback to my team on the positive aspects but also the challenges of hosting an internship, this has shaped the way in which we consider an intern’s need for support and has helped us see that internships should be judged on the development of the individual not on the ‘work outcomes’ achieved. I believe some of which I’ve shared has also fed into our practices with our Kickstarters”.*

We’re happy to see so many host organisations now setting up their own paid internships, but this quote demonstrates a key learning in that there is still a long way to go in the sector for these types of placements to become widespread. The pressures of funding priorities and emphasis on productivity within workplace culture don’t currently allow the space required to support a young person adequately, and for a widespread uptake of paid placement like this, serious and cultural shifts are required. We could have done better in helping to shift this narrative by building strong links between host organisations and youth and community organisations, in spite of the limitations caused by COVID-19. These relationships would’ve ensured a steady flow of talented young people keen to apply for roles in the sector, and the sharing of learnings and best practice

on how to offer effective support to young people would've been hugely beneficial to host organisations.

We have had many successes in achieving this outcome and are excited by the willingness from organisations in the sector to provide opportunities for young people, but one overarching necessity to the success of the internships is the serious commitment and diligence required by the host at all stages of the process. Creating job descriptions, application processes, conducting interviews and delivering training and 1-1 support all require a commitment to the principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, which is incompatible with the emphasis on efficiency in standard recruitment practices. We noticed a correlation between those hosts that were willing and able to put in the extra effort to provide a meaningful, nurturing experience for the young person, and that young person reporting increases in confidence, self-esteem and various other outcomes related to this evaluation.

7. Policymakers and employers gain access to case studies and policy recommendations on improving access to work for young people

"We are not the first minority community to have to fight for our rights, and we won't be the last. These battles are ongoing and seem to be indefinite, but the world should not be this way. No one should have to fight to be treated fairly. There is not enough being done to prevent racism, ableism and discrimination. But you can do your part in creating a just and equal society.

Confronting these uncomfortable truths, openly facing these problems head on by talking and learning is the only way we can eliminate ignorance, which will eliminate fear, and in turn, eliminate injustice, unfairness and ableism."

The above is an excerpt from a powerful call to action one of our former interns produced as part of the PAR project in late 2021. In this letter to the neurotypical society, they call for more awareness, understanding and honesty in conversations around what inhibits access for neurodiverse people to the world of work. It is illustrative of the work we have done in attempting to centre the voices of the young people we are working with and supporting them to have confidence in the change they see needing to happen.

Also related to outcome 3, we asked whether they agreed with the statement *"I have taken part in action aimed at government, policy, or people in positions of power with regards to environmental, social or cultural change more since my internship?"* and we received the following responses:

- 47.5% agree (25% strongly, 22.5% agree)
- 15% disagree,
- 10% Strongly disagree

Most of the young people who agreed with this statement were also PAR researchers. The learnings from the project suggest that this is for two key reasons: first, it can take a long time for young people to develop the confidence to conduct advocacy work. Second, the PAR researchers were working together in a group, supporting each other to take action. The workshops they ran at COP26 and at the Oxford Real Farming Conference were the culmination of what is possible with patience and teamwork. They chose to share the PAR methodology with others through these presentations, which we hope has widened knowledge of PAR as a process and is likely to increase its use in future which may project more young people with similar opportunities.

Whilst we have comparatively less quantitative data on this outcome, our broad ranging activities have helped us to achieve it in a number of ways and has contributed to significant learnings. Some other positive quotes from hosts are detailed below:

- “WRI will be going ahead with a London inclusive internship programme - EcoTalent internship was the first pilot.”
- “It definitely helped in improving the recruitment process for our traineeship, and for designing a process for hiring Kickstart trainees this year. Particularly the use of an application form instead of a cover letter, and offering candidates to make a film if they didn't want to write their answers.”
- “Hosting Ecotalent was a great experience in general, and served as a bit of a pilot that we could learn from, helping in our longer terms plans to hopefully offer another trainee position at the farm specifically for people who are completely new to growing/young people/with the aim of increasing diversity in the farming.”
- “We have also revisited our EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) policies and procedures as they relate to recruitment, and continue to take these under review.”

Our work with neurodiverse young people on this project was also not limited to the example above: another autistic researcher created a manifesto for ‘The One Pot Community’ – a community garden and food cooperative model. Partially inspired by his work placement at Feedback’s Sussex Surplus enterprise in Brighton, the manifesto is a culmination of their work together, explored more deeply through PAR.

Organisations in Feedback’s immediate sphere, including but not limited to EcoTalent host organisations, turned to us to share learnings from the project. We responded by convening our AOP Project with the support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Feedback, along with seven partners, participated in the learning programme. Through the 7 months of the programme organisations were supported through training, action learning methodologies and reflective tools to begin the journey to become anti-racist organisations and build collective commitment to anti-racist principles. We believe that this approach acknowledges the slow pace of change.

40 staff members across the 8 participating organisations took part and each were tasked with creating their own project to further their organisation’s anti-racist work. Several of the projects to emerge from this were related to changing internal HR practices. These efforts will improve access to the sector for underrepresented groups in future.

The report for this project has been shared with the project participants and contains 10 recommendations for change. The work across these organisations both respectively and collectively continues and is likely to become more and more public as the work develops.

DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES

Overview

EcoTalent was, and remains, a critically needed intervention in the food and environment sector if it is to benefit from the talents and vision of young people and be more effective at addressing the enormity of the issues we face.

The food and environmental sector, whilst in some cases demonstrating a willingness to address equity, diversity and inclusion in their organisations in the wake of the BLM movement, still needs to do much more. The EcoTalent programme has demonstrated that there is clear passion, competence, and skills in young people from underrepresented backgrounds to make real change, but they can only flourish when given the opportunity to prove themselves. Through our work on EcoTalent, we have explored some of the key themes that have emerged from the programme and helped us to understand this, and recommendations on ways forward to foster the grassroots, much needed youth-led change we need to see are both outlined below.

Recruitment processes

Many of the questions we asked at the beginning of the project were concerned with the exploration of hiring practices and deepening our understanding how standard recruitment processes may be inherently locking some young people out of participation. We found that entry level roles in the sector often ask for an unnecessary level of work/education experience and computer literacy in relation to the advertised role, and unfair emphasis placed on the ability to promote oneself through a written CV and cover letter application process. Understandably, given the prevalence of funding, time and capacity constraints, many organisations desire quick and simple recruitment processes when bringing new talent to their organisations. However, this tendency to prioritise quick wins is a big barrier to equitable and inclusive recruitment outcomes; therein lies a key opportunity for innovation in seeing lasting change.

Another important finding related to this is that where there is desire to diversify staff teams, there is some anxiety around conducting inclusive recruitment practices – specifically relating to transgressions around positive discrimination law. Through researching this project, we sought legal advice which helped us to understand that we could develop selection criteria which are less competency-based than common criteria. Through this, we were able to prioritise offering roles to young people who either stood to benefit more from the experience, training, and development on offer, showed passion and enthusiasm for the role, and those who are able to demonstrate significant barriers to accessing work.

Furthermore, through simply removing the requirement to submit CV's and cover letters to apply for roles, we saw a dramatic shift in the number and types of applications we received. Crucially, we opted for a simple online application form, which asks applicants to answer broad, uncomplicated questions about their lived experience, and allowed us to understand where their passions may lie. We also asked a question about their experience of barriers to paid employment, giving them an opportunity to share their experience of exclusion. Another effective innovation was our invitation for applicants to submit an audio/video recording of them answering the questions, thereby not disadvantaging someone who may not be skilled in writing.

We are very pleased with the results that our recruitment process engendered, with not only a notable representation of BPoC and neurodiverse young people at both the application stage and successfully applying, but the positivity with which it was received by the hosts we collaborated with was also notable. It was also praised by many of the young people, with one applicant stating, *“some of the questions asked were refreshing and obviously more concentrated on your ethos which shows to me that you care for your causes”*. Another participant, who went on to work with us as a PAR researcher, said: *“I passed through the interview stage which was unique and helpful in its own way because it was relaxed...looking for both passion and skill when asking questions”*.

However, this was only a small part of the journey that young people need to navigate in order to thrive in their work placements and pursue changemaking in their lives. See the recommendations section for some suggestions of ways forward.

Length of intervention/monitoring style

In relation to our outcomes, there is a broad recognition that the paid work opportunities, as expected, were deeply impactful when it came to fostering confidence, self-esteem and encouraging pro-environmental and advocacy behaviours in young people. That said, it became clear that the monitoring of the project, and when certain M&E interventions take place, can have a significant bearing on the findings. Conducting an exit interview immediately after the internship was a good method for understanding young people’s intentions following on from the internships and whether they intend to pursue further work in the sector, but is affected by the energy and enthusiasm (and the unknowns that they are stepping into) they may feel at this point and may taper off after searching for work again, when they are unable to access the same community of support.

We found that those young people who demonstrated retainment of positive outcomes from three months or more after their placement were also those who had longer interventions, such as participating on the PAR project, having their contracts extended or participating in interview processes. This gives us the clear sense that a longer internship length, or the presence of additional opportunities to remain connected to the sector is much more likely to result in positive outcomes further into the future.

The power of community

Despite the excellent feedback from the innovations in our recruitment practices detailed above, we are conscious that our internship opportunities did not reach the audiences we were hoping to as much as we would have liked. Many of the young people who came to find out about them did so in isolation, and not through organisations in their community, such as youth organisations. Whilst COVID-19 restrictions did of course make building in-person, trusting relationships with youth and community organisations very difficult, we have come to understand more deeply that this approach is essential. Young people are much more likely to resonate with the work when they can relate their work back to their community in tangible ways and have a community of support will help them to flourish, and make sense of the challenges they face, both in their day to day and more broadly. Food & farming and youth & community organisations also stand to benefit from improved relationships which could enable both stakeholder groups to widen participation and support for their charitable objectives.

The interns who flourished the most were the ones with a supportive host, who was willing to give the young people responsibility and ownership over tasks and projects, whilst also ensuring that they weren't isolated during their placement. We have also found those who worked with other young people from similar backgrounds, and weren't working alone, had a much more enjoyable experience and were more likely to report meeting the project outcomes.

We are pleased to say that the training and development programme we offered the interns was, as we hoped, widely reported to have been a highlight of the programme, and really helped the interns to feel part of something bigger. Whilst some of the interns struggled to engage with the online format of the training taking place on Zoom (almost all said that in person would have been much more preferable to them), the general sense was that this time to collectively explore the issues we face on earth were of vital importance to the young people.

In future iterations of the programme, we will (as recommended below) remove much of the administrative burden of coordinating internships by using a host regranting arrangement (as opposed to secondment), and redirect team capacity freed up towards more support for interns. We believe that recruiting young people through existing youth and community organisations, where they can draw upon already existing support, and connecting these organisations directly with the hosts, will make a huge difference to their prospects in the sector, especially if their work feels more embedded in their community.

Participation is key

We were delighted to have undertaken Feedback's first PAR project, with 7 intern alumni from the EcoTalent programme. This longer intervention was crucial in giving young people the chance to create space together to make sense of their own experience and was widely reported as a very powerful and transformative process. It was also where a lot of the youth advocacy work took place as part of EcoTalent, after the young people were given the time to deeply explore the issues, individually and collectively. For one of our neurodiverse participants, it was only through undertaking a deep process related to storytelling that they were able to make sense of their story, and compellingly present advocate for organisations to address structural ableism.

It must be noted, however, that this process required much staff resource, and a lot of time was required to achieve the desired outcomes; additionally, the depth of personal exploration required could be potentially harmful to isolated young people if they are not able to complete the process and be supported throughout. We also found that undergoing a research process in which race and neurodivergence were both being explored concurrently, but as standalone issues, affected the ability of the group to coalesce around a group campaign. Despite our best efforts to approach these issues intersectionally, the additional support required by the neurodivergent group brought about challenges in bringing these groups together.

In terms of legacy, as mentioned above, we have successfully received funding from the WWF Land, Food and Farming Fund to run a PAR Project, taking the form of research trips with BPoC and working class young people from England to explore alternative community land use initiatives in Scotland and Wales and ways in which these projects could inspire changes in communal land use in their home regions.

Balancing young person support needs with team capacity

There is clear appetite within the sector for the fresh perspectives and talents that young people, especially those from marginalised communities, can bring to organisations. Many organisations we worked with were fantastically supportive of the initiative and were clearly prepared to go above and beyond to support a young person through the scheme. Even then, capacity and resource constraints still provided big barriers for some organisations who would have otherwise been great hosts. However, we also received a lot of enquiries about the scheme from organisations that didn't seem particularly interested in the aspects related to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we can only surmise that they had heard about the scheme, and the potential for a 'free' member of staff to help support their work inspired them to get in touch.

In terms of going the extra mile to offer support to young people through challenges, the flexibility we had in terms of our staff resource meant that we could offer one of our neurodiverse young people an internship with Feedback, after they withdrew from their farm-based placement. This prioritising of the needs of the young person was extremely important for us, but we appreciate this isn't always possible for other organisations.

This theme suggests that we are at a crucial stage of development in terms of young people accessing paid work in the sector. The willingness to do this work is there, but organisational structures, working cultures that focus heavily on productivity and the pressure to work within funding and capacity constraints are inhibiting further progress.

Celebration, not assimilation – evaluating workplace dynamics

It has become inescapably clear through our relational work with young people, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, that there is often an implicit expectation that young people will fit neatly into the dominant paradigm of any work environment. Within the food and environment sectors, all too often is represented by a structural bias towards white supremacy, able-bodied, and neurotypical ways of working. Our work with neurodiverse young people has illustrated the regularity with which they feel the need to mask their traits, to the point where it is almost an all day, everyday expectation.

Our anti-oppressive practice project has shown that there is a strong desire for this work to take place. The path forward could not have been illustrated more clearly or powerfully than in this excerpt from an open letter to neurotypical society, written by one of our neurodiverse interns: *“Confronting these uncomfortable truths, openly facing these problems head on by talking and learning is the only way we can eliminate ignorance, which will eliminate fear, and in turn, eliminate injustice, unfairness and ableism.”*

Subjects, not objects

Much of the language surrounding interventions aimed to benefit young people, including in the food & environment sectors, fall into a traditional charity service provider/beneficiary dichotomy. We believe there is power in words, and the sooner that this narrative shifts to reflect this

understanding, the sector has much to gain from the talents and perspectives of underrepresented young people. Organisations are often structured and resourced in a way that hiring young people with little to no demonstrable work or education experience constitutes a risk that they are either unable or unwilling to take. If this fundamental view doesn't change, and the sector continues to regard people from marginalised backgrounds and objects rather than subjects, the sector runs the risk of not only not benefitting from the talents and perspectives of young people, but more dangerously reinforcing stereotypes that people from underrepresented backgrounds experience

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through EcoTalent, we have had the pleasure of accompanying 30 young people on their journeys into paid work into the food & environment sector and have seen the powerful transformation that has often taken place when they are entrusted within the workplace. We recognise the unique position we were in to receive this generous funding and fell keenly the need to unpack our learning so that other organisations can take up the mantle and continue this vital work.

The overwhelming positive feedback we received from hosts and young people makes it clear to us that paid work opportunities for young people, designed for those with significant barriers to entry in the sector have an important role to play. Whilst challenging to fund, the increased emphasis on more diversity being required in the sector has seen an increase in the amount of funding available to organisations aiming to do anti-racist work in the food & climate sectors. Taking the risk of employing a young person with no previous experience can feel counter-intuitive to business needs, especially for smaller organisation already struggling to resource their core team. In our experience however, with the right level of commitment, care and consideration we believe that these risks can result in significant benefits to both interns and the.

There is still a huge amount to be done in order ensure that the legacy of this work, and the great work of many other organisations across the spectrum of environmental and social justice movements is as effective as possible in dismantling and recreating the power structures which need to change. Our recommendations to ensure we pursue this opportunity are given below under heading which we hope will help consolidate what is an extensive selection of findings and observations.

Funding paid internships

There is work to be done to experiment with different models of funding for placements like the EcoTalent internships. Not only are paid roles like these difficult to fund through traditional trusts and foundations, but entry-level, short-term jobs often don't result in the impacts that many funders are hoping for. Added to this, we were unable to ensure that organisations felt confident and resourced enough to fund their own internships after hosting an EcoTalent intern.

We suggest that potential grant givers offer multi-intern contracts with a sliding scale, where a host would, for example, commit to hiring 3 interns, with the costs of the first being a full grant, the second intern half funded, and the third intern 33% funded. This will lay the groundwork for organisations to be able to not only recognise the benefits of hosting paid internships, but also fully integrate such positions into ongoing fundraising, a key element of making this sustainable.

Organisations within the progressive food and farming sector could also be served by exploring ways to access the apprenticeship levy to resource follow-on opportunities for engaged young people who are ready to progress beyond short term internships. Apprenticeships are an under-utilised tool overall, with an increasing number of placements being filled by adults. Use of the internships and apprenticeships in tandem could provide an excellent way for organisations to build effective talent pipelines, which also increase equitable employment sector-wide.

Administrating internship schemes

There are a number of practical and administrative recommendations that we have, for both organisations interested in running a similar internship scheme, or working with marginalised young people more generally:

- Placements would benefit from being longer than 15 weeks. Many of our interns suggest that a longer placement would have given them the opportunity to settle in and get more comfortable. We have also found that young people were more likely to retain behaviours mentioned in the outcomes (confidence, speaking to friend/family about the climate crisis, etc) if they had a longer intervention (extension of placement, PAR process).
- Our secondment arrangement to employ young people was in some ways effective, but more broadly we believe for those with money to fund internships, a regranting system, rather than seconding, may be more appropriate and simpler. This is for the following reasons:
 - Secondment can be administratively burdensome, and significantly slow down the process of onboarding
 - A regranting arrangement can give clarity on professional boundaries, outlining more clearly which organisation is responsible for what. We found that a secondment arrangement can possibly dilute the sense of responsibility we expect from the hosts
 - It is possible that this lack of clarity can lead to a sense of the host feeling disempowered, and unable to make the final decision on who they hire through the recruitment process.
- Acknowledging that the scheme was created quickly to address a nearly unprecedented global crisis, we believe that the Kickstart Scheme's unwieldiness was in part due to the number of actors needed to work in concert to set-up, recruit and administer internships. With this in mind, we would recommend that institutions, funders and mezzanine organisations seeking to run similar schemes in the future ensure that the process holds firm to the principle of subsidiarity – tasks which can be fulfilled by placement providers should be delegated to them in accordance with their existing systems and processes.
- A simple partnership agreement or MoU is the best way forward for any organisations interested in this funding internships at other organisations

After receiving legal advice at the beginning of the project, we opted for a very formal contract which formed the basis of our agreement with host organisations. The contract, which was long and quite unwieldy, in some instances slowed down the process of securing host organisations, and on reflection, sent the wrong message to hosts. The formality of the document placed a burden of responsibility on the hosts, and gave a sense that we were expecting them to accept responsibility where things didn't go as planned. We wanted to move away from this process which may needlessly encourage legal action, which was made more complex by Feedback technically being the young person's employer.

- In order to ensure the impact of internships for young people and mitigate the risk of organisations accessing schemes to exploit subsidised labour, the following general selection guidelines can be integrated within the gearing up process for placements. These questions may be suitable for application forms for organisations or may be integrated within initial discussions. Each can be used independently, and it is not our intention that they all be deployed to increase the organisational burden associated with structuring placements.

- *Is the placement provider demonstrably committed to improving diversity, equity, and inclusion? What actions have they taken recently, and what are their plans beyond hosting the internship in question?*

This commitment will underpin any effort required to flex plans to create a placement which is beneficial both to the intern and the organisation they will be working with.

- *Does the placement provider have a discreet project which the intern will be responsible for?*

This ensures the intern is granted at least one high quality learning opportunity on the job, even where general responsibilities may be mundane and/or so varied as to appear random.

- *Can the placement provider commit to providing clear instruction and explanation of the significance of tasks before or when they are assigned to interns?*

Internships are intended to be an equal exchange of learning and labour. It should be clear that placement providers are able to hold up their end of the bargain.

- *Will the intern have a line manager, an appropriate number of supervision meetings and receive constructive feedback?*

This will be key to intern's learning and inclusion within the workplace.

- *Does the placement provider have a clear sense of the level of needs they can accommodate?*

Many marginalised young people are sensitive to failure. While learning to overcome this may be a key part of their journey, all pains should be made to avoid mismatched between intern and organisations. This may result in interns internalising organisational failures or avoiding honest analysis of their developmental areas. An honest assessment of organisational readiness to support young people's needs enabled this risk to be mitigated early on.

- *What would the placement organisation like to learn or achieve from hosting this internship?*

It is helpful to understand how this placement fits in with the organisation's broader development journey, making the additional effort worthwhile.

- *Can the placement organisation commit to supporting high quality interns to secure further employment through their networks?*

One of the core strengths of internships is that it provides new entrants to a field with networks that can help them secure gainful employment. The track record young people will gain and display on their CV will of course be valuable. However, it's important to not lose the core strength of internships as we work to make access to them equitable: that if you leave a positive impression, your host organisation may help you establish a career.

Financial considerations when working with young people

Given our relative inexperience in working with young people from backgrounds of marginalisation, we had some really important learnings gleaned from this process. We had to quickly understand how working with young people with disabilities and housing instability would have their benefit entitlements affected by paid work. As such, we had to challenge our assumption that paid internships are beneficial in all circumstances. To make roles truly accessible to young people, we have outlined the following financial considerations for working with young people:

- Build flexibility into contracts to account for varying circumstances between interns. For some young people, including those with disabilities, working over 15 hours per week can make them ineligible for the Employment and Support Allowance they are in receipt of. The DWP also has rules on what kind of work is acceptable, and ESA recipients need to request the ability to work from the DWP. In our case, we were able to double the length of the young person's internship to 30 weeks, given that they were only working 15 of the proposed 30 hours per week.
 - The Real Living Wage is only really a living wage if enough (full time) hours are available for the young person. A job which is paid at the Real Living Wage, but is less than 5 days per week, is likely to take someone over the threshold of benefit entitlement, but not providing enough income to comfortably cover average living costs. Therefore as well as having the flexibility to reduce hours for young people with disabilities for instance, providers must also be able to increase the number hours for those who are living independently without the support of their family. Not doing so risks young people falling into debt, financial insecurity, or to try to unsustainably balance multiple low paid jobs.
- We recommend early on in the relationship with an intern, that a financial management session/budgeting session should be undertaken to ensure that the young person is unlikely to suffer any adverse effects as a result of their paid placement. Benefits related to disabilities, housing and council tax may be affected, and young people won't always be fully aware of this going into the internship.

Training and development

Our initial instinct on designing our training and development programme was to map out the knowledge and skills young people from diverse backgrounds would need to perform as in an unchanged progressive food and farming sector. We quickly realised that this approach was incorrect and ineffective. 15 weeks is not enough to offset 18-24 years of implicit and explicit learning that interns may have been excluded from due to systemic inequality. This approach also indirectly justifies and maintains the homogeneity of the progressive food and farming sector by setting the ability to conform with the status quo as the pass/fail metric which either opens or closes career progression. The below recommendations set out how we believe training and development providers can ensure this is no longer the case:

- Training and development offers should be rooted in strengths-based practice rather than deficit-based approaches. In practice, this means departing from the perspective that young people possess skills, strengths and knowledge which could be of use to the sector, and organisation's charitable objectives providing they have the support they need to deploy them effectively.
 - While not a pre-requisite, this is helped greatly by having a firmly rooted understanding of the broader work society as a whole and organisations are doing to address structural inequality. For instance, understanding that your organisation struggles to engage young carers, thus sustaining unequal outcomes in the community, may mean you need new ways to look at and approach or structure for your work. Broad and varied perspectives maximise opportunities for lateral thinking in pursuing such opportunities.
 - Doing so also opens up the opportunity to create participative structures within the training offer. Our experience is that participative practice is much more conducive to giving rise to activism, social action, and youth leadership.
- Training providers should seek to integrate young people's existing support networks into pastoral care. Young people can be reluctant to divulge full details of their personal situation to new people, just as any other person is likely to. This presents the risk of gaps in communication cropping up where the intern's emotional or socioeconomic wellbeing falters. By seeking consent to liaise with existing support networks (housing support officers, work coaches, parents where the intern is disabled) training and pastoral care providers can work as part of a broader team to maximise engagement in training and employment, and ensure their hard work is not jeopardised by the complexity of their lives.
- In many ways, the pandemic forced us to consider blended learning methods. While our sense was that relationship formation suffered without face-to-face engagement, we also noted that it enabled the participation of interns with social anxiety or who may have struggled with travel due to responsibilities in the home. Training providers should seek to deploy blended learning methods to maximise engagement for a diverse set of young people. To do this, its essential digital inclusion is included within the project budget. We have also found digital whiteboard platforms such as Miro invaluable in varying exercises and replicating the benefits of in-person group work.

- It's worthwhile addressing relationship formation directly. Strong supportive relationships are a key feature of strong working cultures. For young people who may feel tentative about the sector, without a career plan or acutely aware of their difference in new environs, strong peer-to-peer relationships are a key protective factor for their wellbeing, and in our experience results in a greater desire to stay in the sector or placement organisation. Relationship formation should be designed into programmes where the desired impact is sector wide (i.e. moves beyond individual employability to address workforce composition). As such, a balance between content absorption, career exploration and team building should be sought.
- Reflective practice and objective setting are vital in enabling interns to personalise their learning journey to address their ambitions, develop a keen understanding of what they have achieved and how, and ensure failures and missteps contribute to learning rather than reinforce negative self-talk that may occur due to low self-esteem. Providers should think about how 1-2-1 support and independent tasks might be deployed to structure cycles of objective setting, action, reflection, learning, and so on again.

Anti-racist practice

The following 10 recommendations for change were developed at the end of Feedback's Anti Oppressive Practice co-learning group and are recommendations for the organisations that took part. They are included here due to their widespread applicability:

- We recommend that those groups of staff who participated in the programme meet deliberately to mark the end of the programme and update one another on their learning, achievements and agree next steps internally for the continuation of this work.
- Organisations who participated in the programme should 'come out' as Anti-Racist – or at least in their commitment to becoming such. This can be done not just through statements but also through sharing learning from the programme through blogs, speaking engagements and the like.
- As staff re-establish their work on anti-racism in early 2022 a brief review of where organisations have got to will be useful. Using the ladders in the learning journal can help facilitate this review. Taking time to consolidate work delivered so far and ensure time and budget is in place to move forward will be important.
- A participant or organisation(s) need to be identified to progress the immediate next steps listed in the previous section. It would be useful to deliver the actions in the above table before the end of Q1 2022 to maintain momentum.
- A participant or organisation from the programme is needed to take responsibility for capturing and sharing a long list of planned and current anti-racist action happening in organisations that participated in the programme. This will provide all participants with a reference list of people to contact in relation to future opportunities to discuss or collaborate. Annex 1 can be used as a starting point.

- Antiracist work is a process of organisational change and as such it requires subject knowledge, budget, leadership, and project management. Any organisation planning to continue in its anti-racist journey would benefit from securing funding to support their work with some external facilitation.
- Creating spaces for all staff to continue to discuss racism will be a useful legacy from this work. Within this the creation of dedicated spaces for black and brown staff to discuss the specific impacts racism has on them is critical. The anti-racist working groups and networks underway leave organisations well placed to develop such spaces.
- Discussions that ensure responsibility and roles for driving this agenda are well defined will be important. Going forward establishing responsibility for action with senior leaders, while creating opportunities for staff engagement and leadership at varying levels will ensure any future work is appropriately held, directed, and positioned internally.
- Discussion and learning together within and between organisations were an essential ingredient in the programme. Finding new ways to come together internally and externally will support the change making process. Making some joint anti-racist advocacy plans to progress anti-racism in the UK food and farming sector would be a strong starting point.
- Increasing diversity in the workforce, that can cover recruitment, but also promotion and leadership development of existing staff, is a critical component at the early stages of exploring anti-racist action and would benefit from being prioritised.

PROJECT LEGACY

The Ecotalent Programme has been a very powerful, at times challenging, but overall successful start of Feedback's journey into working more relationally with young people, and deepening participation in our programmes. In addition to the immediate funding support we are hoping to provide for some of our PAR researchers, Feedback have been considering how we as an organisation move forward after this programme, and we are reflecting on how best to embed the learnings from this programme into all of our future programmes.

We are already in the process of launching the next iteration of this programme, building on the learnings from EcoTalent. Over the next two years, EcoTalent will work to reimagine internships into an intentional interruption to patterns of access and exclusion produced within society and reproduced within our sector. We will begin the process of transforming our understanding of BPOC people to include the diverse subjectivity which is currently ignored and erased. We will refashion EcoTalent's developmental programme to place collective power and the reimagination of alternative systems at its core. This new approach will be piloted with a 10-month Fellowship structure for 10 young people, 'EcoTalent Fellows' from Black, Asian and Mixed backgrounds.

Alongside this, we have launched the Green Futures programme in Buckinghamshire, a bespoke youth employability and green vocation scheme that:

- 1) Offers empowering experiences for school aged young people (ages 11-17) through a range of vocational green career encounters raising aspirational connections for young people linking to employment opportunities in the food sector.
- 2) Invests in building synergy, capacity and partnership working between the food and youth sectors to increase local career pathways through our convened network of youth and food sector organisations across Buckinghamshire.
- 3) Provides an innovative 15-week internship scheme for 8 placements across Bucks, targeting unemployed or underemployed young people aged 18-24 from underrepresented groups within the food sector.

Finally, we have recently successfully received funding from the WWF Land, Food and Farming Fund to run our project "Growing Off Grid", a Participatory Action Research Project running research trips with BPoC and working-class young people from England to explore alternative community land use initiatives in Scotland and Wales, and explore ways in which these projects could inspire changes in communal land use in their home regions. There is much work to be done to dismantle and rebuild power structures that lock people out of participation in the sector, but we have experienced a shift in the last two years.

We would like to offer our thanks to the Our Bright Future team, for their trust, support, encouragement, belief, patience and flexibility, which has enabled this project to flourish well beyond our initial ambitions.

APPENDIX 1

Theory of change situation analysis

1. Situation Analysis

a. Problem statement

The environmental and community food sectors (particularly in London) are not reflective of the diversity of the population. There are significant barriers to entry into careers in these sectors for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (BIPoC, LGBT+, socio-economically disadvantaged people)

b. Focussing on the problem

Who is affected? Who is particularly vulnerable? What type of person?

People from backgrounds of socio – economic disadvantages – this includes but is not limited to: BIPoC, LGBT+, care leavers, people with disabilities (physical and learning), people with mental health problems

What are the consequences of this problem?

The sector is unable to benefit from the experiences and perspectives of people from these demographics, thereby rendering it unable to create solutions that represent the interests of everyone. People from the above backgrounds are less able to cultivate a relationship with nature and food, and struggle to build agency relating to sustainable food. They also may have little faith that organisations within these sectors have their best interests at heart, causing further disengagement. NGOs and food initiatives become a hostile, violent environment for people from these backgrounds

What are the causes of these problems?

a. Individual capacities and relationships

People not seeing themselves reflected in organisations within the sectors causes them to “self-disqualify”. People without disposable income/stable finances are unable to take on unpaid internships or volunteering. People may not see opportunities visibly advertised within their communities and networks. Lack of confidence and perceived relevant skills for the sector

b. Institutions

There is a widespread lack of understanding within the sector on the prevalence of unconscious bias. Organisations do not/are not able to put in place extra measures or support structures for people with additional/complex needs. There is a lack of lived experience of marginalisation throughout all levels in the sector (especially at senior management level). Organisations do not prioritise innovative and community-focused hiring practices to diversify their workforce.

c. Infrastructural systems

Discrimination law means organisations are unable to positively discriminate to diversify their workforce. Sector dependent on highly educated workforces – education structures are less accessible to target group – institutional/structural racism.

What are the barriers to change?

Resistance within the sector to dedicate the necessary resources/evaluate their working culture to create a suitable working environment (lack of training). Current overwhelming lack of diversity results and high staff turnover when successfully hiring from diverse communities. Target groups may not identify with careers in the sector. Lack of educational opportunities. Perceived barrier into the sector can cause resistance/skepticism in joining sector, and creating a protective niche.

What are the opportunities to overcome these barriers?

Providing short term paid internships. Gathering learnings and sharing within the sector and more widely. Publicly criticising the sector for its inaction whilst recognising our own shortcomings. Coordinating training for organisations in the sector to improve their hiring practices. Sustained engagement within communities to advertise opportunities more widely. Designing pastoral programme which reflects lived experience. Providing support structures and mechanisms to help build resilience and stay the distance. Focus on fostering an increase in confidence and self (and group) reflection and learning how to communicate skills. Unionism/collective power and agency as post internship/ongoing support. Building collective power through participatory learning processes.

Who else is working to tackle the issue? Who are the other relevant stakeholders?

A selection of other NGOs including Sustain, SOS-UK, Food Matters, CharitySoWhite, LION (Land in Our Names), Flock Together (Instagram) Kickstart consortia

What is not happening? What are the gaps?

Gap in sectoral understanding of the complex intersection of many issues for target group, not just related to career. Organisations not taking seriously their responsibility to create a more radically inclusive working culture. Efforts to reflect on the necessary changes can be tokenistic and vague. Paid internship schemes or other projects to create routes into work are rare and underfunded. Follow on opportunities not given enough emphasis beyond entry points. Job/career opportunities are not being made sufficiently visible to target group. Sector finds it easy to ignore the target group – sector seeks validation from mostly white elites (courting up). Lack of dialogue and genuine opportunities for engagement, building community-owned knowledge. Not forming collective bargaining power within diverse communities – too much focus on individual journeys.

What resources do we have to tackle the problem? Think about things like:

a. Reputation

Feedback is beginning to be seen as an authority within the sector on issues relating to DEI – proven track record (RFE's)

b. Expertise

Research and policy focus. Building expertise around regional economies work (closed loops, circular systems) – put ideas/visions into practice – proven track record

c. Experiences

Solid understanding of the strengths/weaknesses/limitations of the NGO sector – worked on Farm to Fork project with 18-24 y.o.'s. Knowledge of how different types of organisations within the sector work.

d. Connections and networks

Well connected to both environmental NGO's and grassroots community food initiatives (not well connected to communities YP though). Academia (food and environment) – can extend these academic relationships beyond food.

e. Funding

OBF funding is a rare opportunity – big pot funding. Kickstart funding can help extend this. Deliver services for organisations in sector to support their EDI.

2. Given our resources, what broadly will we do? Where might we make the most difference? What are our best bets? What should our role be?

Sharing learnings from the project with the wider sector as a mediator, during and at the end of the project. Change catalyst, mechanism to speed up progress and hold sector and ourselves to account. Positioning ourselves as a trusted ally within justice campaigning. Working with our extensive network of NGO's and community initiatives as hosts – provide them with training and learnings around recruitment practices and retention. We can make a difference to employment opportunities in a hyperlocal context (eg London boroughs with high levels of diversity). Facilitating new entrants into the sector for target group, creating a support structure for young people to help foster resilience and “staying power” 😊 Working with academics from different disciplines on questions around mobility for target group. Exploring alternatives to current employment pathways. Evaluating employment trends within the sector (tension between current status quo of regular job changes within sector compared to loyalty/long term employment trends within target group. Enriching the network with opportunities for our interns. Fostering/facilitating collective knowledge building and action/networks within young people

3. Who do we need to work with?

NGO's both small and large, grassroots community initiatives related to food and social justice (hosts). Schools, youth organisations, volunteering organisations, grassroots food orgs (YP recruitment)

4. What options, strategies or approaches are we ruling out? Why?

Unpaid internships/employment (not sustainable) Deficit based training (focusing on fostering and facilitating and participation rather than “giving”) rejecting individualistic approaches. Ruling out factional politics and culturally blind universalism – will work intersectionally and constructively. Business as usual re hiring – expecting change to come within existing practices/models. Ruling out top down validation.

Target groups

We want to work directly with:

- Young people: Aged 18-24, no previous experience in sector, a variety of backgrounds (BIPoC, LGBT+, care leavers, people with disabilities (physical and learning), people with mental health problems, working class. Unlikely to attend/have attended university.
- YP Recruitment: Schools, Youth Organisations/campaigns, volunteering organisations
- Host organisations: NGO's both small and large, grassroots community initiatives related to food and social justice (hosts).
- Other (campaign allies): Anti-oppression trainers, food justice campaigners, other NGO's, funders and government (local and national), unions

APPENDIX 2

Natalie Ann Tamburrini's Personal Story & letter to neurotypical society

Before I begin, I want to explain some terminology used throughout this document:

Allistic: means someone who isn't Autistic

Neurodivergent: describes a different brain type that diverges from the majority population

Neurotypical: It's the most common brain type of the majority population; It means someone without any developmental delays, mental disorders or neurological conditions.

Ableism: Being in favour of able-bodied and able-minded, Neurotypical people, and discriminating against disabled people with or without malice and intention.

To Neurotypical Society,

It is important to me that my voice be one of importance; A voice that is not only heard, but one that is able to create change.

It is important to me because I speak not just for myself, but for a whole community who are having to fight to be listened to.

We are not the burden that society has labelled us.

We are not just your list of stereotypes.

We are hope for a better future.

We are an example of unlocked potential.

We are held back by society because you think differently to us, and that scares you. You don't understand us; We are a minority, and that scares you.

I am here to tell you that it is okay to be afraid. But it is not okay to turn that fear into hate, anger or prejudice. Take your fear, embrace it and understand it. Overcome it and use it to learn; to educate yourself. Use your fear as a tool to integrate yourself into our world. We deserve better.

Don't push us away. Don't exclude us from your social circle, or your games in the playground; Don't make fun of us and call us names. Don't prevent us from accessing the same jobs, roles and dreams as you.

We can do everything you do and more, we just do it differently. It's not about what WE are lacking, it's about the tools that society is lacking to accommodate our Neurodivergent minds, to help us be integrated.

We have charities, legislation, and some people in power fighting for Equity rights and Inclusion. But there are not enough Actually Autistic people standing up to be heard, and we are not using our voices loud enough. So I am standing up for all Autistic people and I will use my voice to make this world more accessible to us so we can have all the freedoms, rights and choices that Allistic's have.

We don't want awareness and Equality, we want acceptance and Equity; We want a world where we don't have to exhaust ourselves masking to meet Allistic social expectations, we want a world where we can communicate naturally and stim openly without criticism and judgement, we want a world that doesn't cause sensory overloads and shutdowns.

We demand mutual respect within our schools and workplaces by our peers, and within society as a whole. We demand recognition of our capabilities; A recognition of the fact that we do not lack certain desirables found in Allistic behaviour and thinking, we just display our emotions in a different way, and our logical thought patterns are different to Allistic's. therefore, unrelatable, which is exactly what society fears; The unknown.

We are not the first minority community to have to fight for our rights, and we won't be the last. These battles are ongoing and seem to be indefinite, but the world should not be this way. No one should have to fight to be treated fairly. There is not enough being done to prevent racism, ableism and discrimination. But you can do your part in creating a just and equal society.

Confronting these uncomfortable truths, openly facing these problems head on by talking and learning is the only way we can eliminate ignorance, which will eliminate fear, and in turn, eliminate injustice, unfairness and ableism.

No one should fear for their safety at work.

(Story of what happened = Empathy)

I was on Facebook when I saw an advert for an internship placement on a livestock farm. I remember the advert being targeted specifically towards young adults who have struggled getting into mainstream work, or who feel that work isn't as accessible to them as it is to others. In other words, this ad was addressing vulnerable young adults with little or no experience in the workplace.

This applied to me as I am an Autistic 20-something year old who struggles with anxiety disorder and depression, and I had never been employed before.

The Intern role would include full days working on a livestock and vegetable growing farm, shadowing staff members and completing tasks.

The host company, FEEDBACK was employing me as their Intern, and they sent me to a farm who they had partnered with who agreed to take on Interns from FEEDBACK.

I was Interviewed by my manager at FEEDBACK and the person who would be my manager on the farm. I expressed my feelings about my Autism diagnosis, and I mentioned Autism a number of times during the interview process. Everyone was aware of my neurological condition, and I was happy that I was as transparent as I could be with full disclosure so there was no confusion going forwards.

I got the job! My first job! I was ecstatic! I was so proud, I could burst!

I have been to job interviews in the past and been told that I am not fit for work because my Autism would get in the way of me doing a good job. It's Ableism at its finest.

Looking back, what should have happened at this point is a meeting with my farm manager to discuss what I needed to have put in place so I could do the best job I could do; We needed to discuss accommodations and adjustments so that my workplace was accessible to me as someone with a disability.

What actually happened is I was told what day I should arrive for my first full day of work at what time. I had an anxiety attack that morning in my car and didn't even make it to the gates. First red flag.

I ignored and brushed away all the things that made me uncomfortable and upset and settled it in my brain as "this was just part of work and I just have to get on with it". My own ignorance and internal ableism let me down.

The last straw for me was an incident that happened while I was working on the farm.

I was struggling with my mental and physical health during this time and I was physically and mentally exhausted. I was struggling to complete the simplest of tasks.

One of my colleagues got frustrated at me and was shouting at me and telling me to go home because I don't work hard enough.

I had an Autism meltdown in the carpark of the farm.

A meltdown for me means getting on the floor, becoming non-verbal and unable to communicate, rocking back and forth, crying, hyperventilating, screaming out loud, punching my legs and arms, flapping my hands, pinching my wrists, kicking; There is a lot.

My farm manager didn't know what to do. She did everything you're not supposed to do to someone having an Autism meltdown.

She grabbed my wrists; told me I can't behave this way; She threatened to call an ambulance if I don't stop immediately. This terrified me.

If an ambulance crew came, they would have not known what was wrong with me and they would have got the police involved because I would have been uncooperative, the police would have

restrained me and hurt me, they could have sectioned me and taken me to a mental health facility and detained me. This is a very true and very real possibility.

(Why am I telling? = context)

A meltdown can look terrifying to someone who doesn't understand what's going on or know what to do and I understand and respect that. I should have done more to protect my welfare, my needs and my rights. But I didn't understand my rights at the time and what the law entitled me to. The farm manager should have done more to make sure my needs and rights were met.

This isn't an isolated incident. More than half of all Autistic adults are unemployed because the workplace is inaccessible to us; Our needs are not met, and it isn't safe for us, even though there are laws that are meant to be protecting us, not enough is done to enforce these legislations.

I have chosen to share my story to show that we are far from Equity and inclusion within the food system. Jobs in the food industry are not accessible to everyone and this is a major problem; Especially because the Food industry can also benefit from employing Autistic individuals, people of minority communities and disabled people. It's not only us who benefit from being accepted in the food system.

(What do we do? = Call to action)

I propose that we use a clearer, detailed document to help enforce the legislation "The Equality Act 2010" properly and fairly so that companies, managers and employees understand completely what their rights are, what disabled employees are entitled to, and how to have their rights enforced.

I call this proposal 'The PIE plan'. It stands for Personal Inclusion & Equity Plan. I believe that all businesses, companies and workplaces who employ Autistic people and disabled people should implement this plan and use it to help make sure that the workplace is accessible, safe and welcoming to disabled and vulnerable employees.

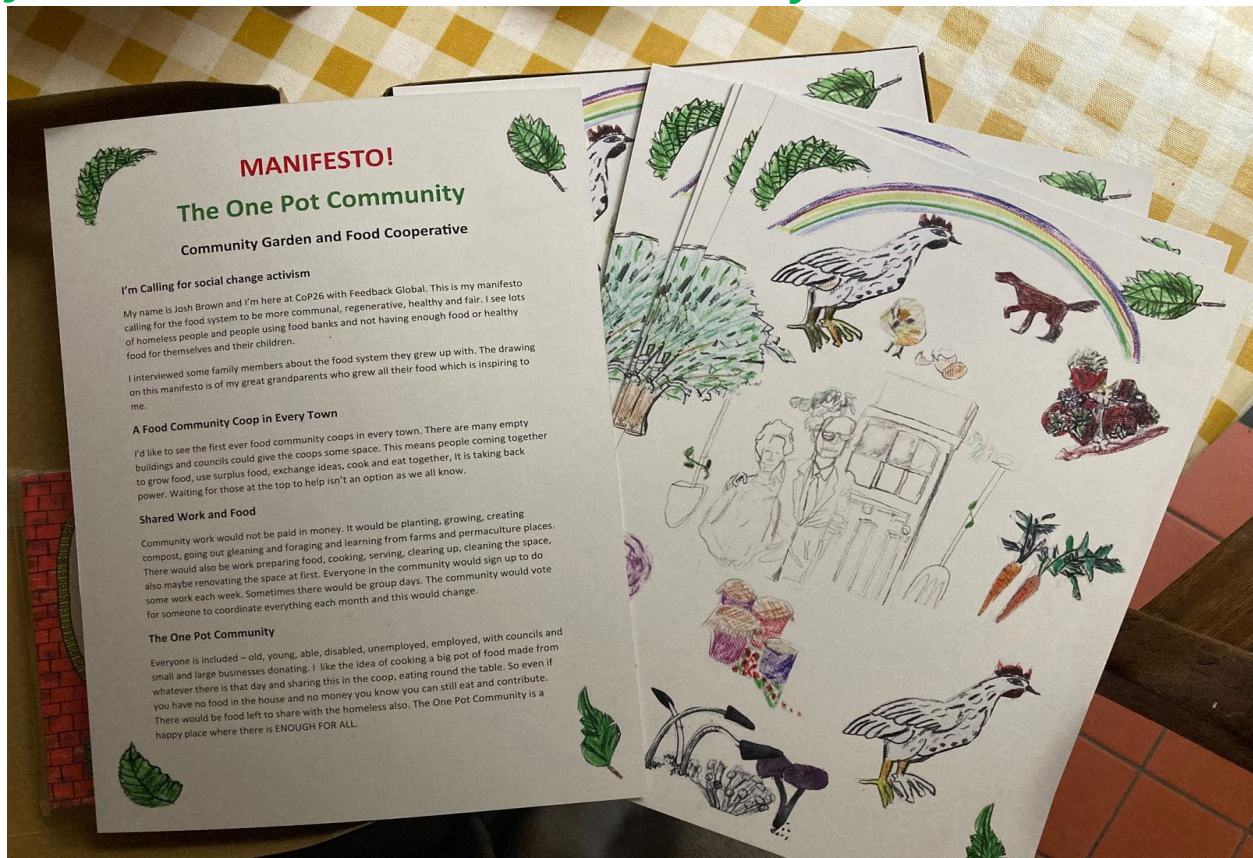
The 'PIE Plan' is not yet enforceable through legislation, but it would greatly help make following the legislation easier and a smoother process. It would benefit not only disabled people, but it will also benefit companies and managers who want to employ disabled people because it helps with understanding individuals needs and accommodations and how to implement those adjustments.

(Outcome = what does an inclusive food system look like?)

If all businesses and companies used the PIE Plan as an aid to ensure that the rights, needs and accommodations are met for vulnerable and disabled people in the food system and the workplace, more disabled people will be employed and have a fairer opportunity to the same jobs as Neurotypical and non-disabled people. Companies and businesses would benefit greatly from knowing how to accommodate disabled people so that there is greater diversity in the workplace, as well as unique perspectives and ideas. Different ways of thinking equal sufficiency.

APPENDIX 3

Josh Brown's The One Pot Community Manifesto



APPENDIX 4:

Further links to young people's content

- COP26 “Young Seeds For Your Thoughts” event:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNkYxX90O7Y&t=7s>
- Oxford Real Farming Conference: A Young Person's View: Using Participatory Action Research towards a Regenerative Food System
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dn5UUCZOw48>
- Farmerama Episode, COP26 Glasgow Growing Participatory Action Research and Migrant Worker Solidarity: <https://farmerama.co/uncategorized/69-cop-26-glasgow-growing-participatory-action-research-and-migrant-worker-solidarity/>

APPENDIX 5:

Final AOP Evaluation

The final evaluation of the AOP project was attached upon the final submission of this report. The document was entitled:

OBF EcoTalent Evaluation Appendix 5 - AOP Final Evaluation vf.pdf