




ECO CHALLENGE



A JOURNEY FROM CHALLENGING
TO CHANGING PLACES

FSC

BRINGING
ENVIRONMENTAL
UNDERSTANDING TO ALL



I can't put
into words
how this
experience
has changed
the way I
see life

Student

ECO CHALLENGE

The Eco Challenge project (2007-2011) was an innovative project which built on a challenging residential experience in remote, rugged and awe inspiring landscapes, to develop opportunities for young people to take part in local environmental projects.

6,700 students
from 245 schools

Delivered by the Field Studies Council (FSC) and funded by the Big Lottery Changing Spaces programme, the project worked with some of the most disadvantaged schools and communities in England. For thousands of participants this was their first stay away from their home. For some it was a life changing experience.

Altogether, Eco Challenge was a project which exceeded all of its formal outcomes and provided some extra and unexpected benefits.



ECO CHALLENGE IMPACTS

Over 90% of teachers thought that their students had:

- ✓ Achieved an increase in understanding of the environment.
- ✓ Improved personal and social development skills including cooperation, communication, self esteem and self confidence.
- ✓ Gained a sense of pride for local green spaces.
- ✓ An increased awareness of sustainability issues.

Over half of the students:

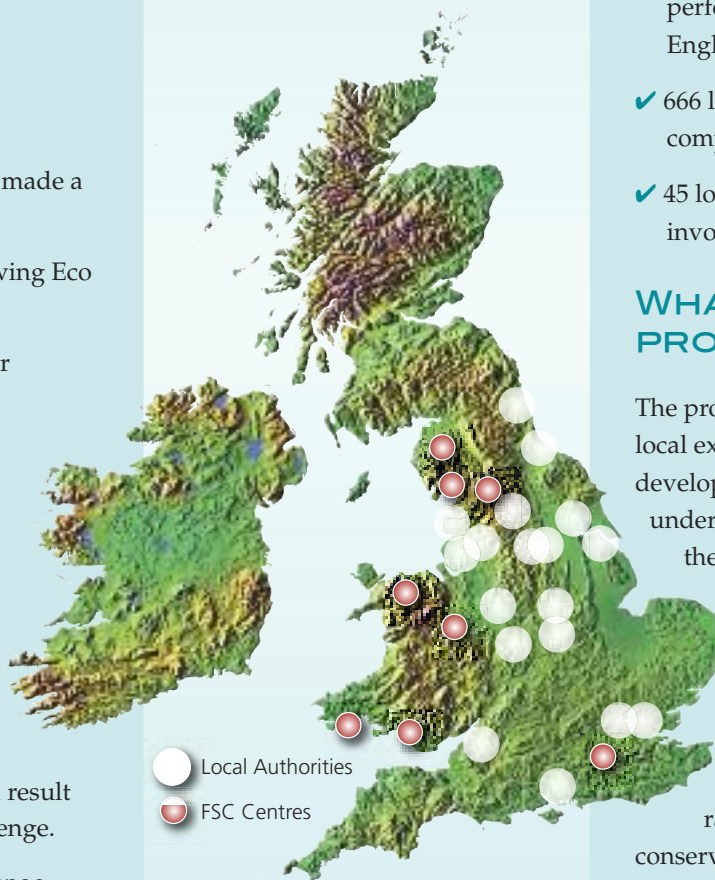
- ✓ Said that Eco Challenge had made a difference to them.
- ✓ Used local parks more following Eco Challenge.
- ✓ Had more positive behaviour towards environmentally sustainable actions.

THE LASTING IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

- ✓ 15% intended to continue or develop Eco School or Sustainable School awards.
- ✓ 19% started an Eco Club as a result of involvement in Eco Challenge.
- ✓ 67% extended the Eco Challenge experience within the school community.
- ✓ 11% intended to repeat or take another group on a residential – though funding was stated as a barrier to this occurring.

Schools from these Local Authority areas took part

Barnsley, Blackpool, Bradford, Bristol City, Doncaster, Halton, Islington, Kingston upon Hull, Knowsley, Leicester City, Liverpool, Manchester, Middlesbrough, N.E. Lincolnshire, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham City, Portsmouth, Salford, Sandwell, Stoke, Thurrock, Tower Hamlets.



Residential locations

FSC Centres – Blencathra, Castle Head, Juniper Hall, Malham Tarn, Margam Discovery Centre, Orielton, Preston Montford, Rhyd-y-creuau.

ECO CHALLENGE KEY FACTS

- ✓ 6,700 Key Stage 3 (11-14 years) students took part.
- ✓ 245 schools from 22 of the lowest performing Local Authorities in England.
- ✓ 666 local sessions took place to complete 220 projects.
- ✓ 45 local volunteering groups involved.

WHAT MADE THE PROJECT SPECIAL?

The project combined residential and local experiences focussing on personal development and increased understanding and involvement in the natural environment.

The residential programme was delivered at FSC Centres and combined challenging outdoor activities, environmental awareness raising activities and practical conservation skills training.

Project staff coordinated follow-up sessions with local environmental organisations to enable students and teachers to carry out environmental projects in the school grounds or local area.



The group was made up of a mixture of boys and girls, and for the first time, a mixture of year groups. I think this was one of the trips greatest successes, as older pupils looked out for the more vulnerable younger ones, which led to a supportive, relaxed and hard-working ethos Teacher



The Successes

PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The funding enabled schools to offer an opportunity to students who are not usually included in residential experiences. Schools had freedom to select students and used a wide range of criteria – from rewarding good behaviour, effort or increased attendance, to those with difficult home circumstances or economic disadvantage. This meant there was a huge diversity between and within groups. Mixed groups from years 7 to 9 were common.



For many young people a residential away from home in the company of others who they may not know very well, or at all, can be a daunting experience. The residential programme included many opportunities for individual personal development and team building activities. Students were often stretched beyond their comfort zone whether through the personal challenge of a long walk, overcoming their fear of heights while climbing, or having to share communal space for eating and sleeping.

Reviewing was an integral part of the programme so that students and staff were made aware of their achievements, and were able to reflect on the impact of the experience. Improved communication between students, and between students and teachers, was reported. Many students commented on increased self-esteem and confidence following Eco Challenge.

It has helped me trust people more and I'm closer to people I didn't talk to before Student

Their confidence and self esteem has gone through the roof as a result of this experience Teacher

Eco Challenge has given me a sense of achievement – because you achieve small things that make a big difference Student

Many students were personally challenged and proud of their achievements Teacher

Eco Challenge made me realise how much fun the outdoors can be Student

The best part was making the wigwam out of willow. The team had to pull together to make it work. It gave you a real sense of accomplishment to see it finished Student

Pupils have been more willing to talk to each other and share ideas and thoughts outside of their friendship groups. This was evident in the follow-up workshops. Some of the 'quieter' girls have shown a greater confidence in talking to other pupils and to staff Teacher



EXPERIENCING NEW PLACES

Witnessing the growth in pride, self-fulfilment and teamwork in students from inner cities taking part in challenging activities is nothing new to outdoor providers. However, using this development as a springboard to increased environmental understanding, learning new skills through practical conservation activities and then using these to take part in practical action close to home is a novel and exciting approach, and one that proved successful in Eco Challenge.

Almost a third of the 6,700 students had never been away from home before. Eco Challenge broadened horizons and changed attitudes both towards remote landscapes far from home, but also towards previously unexplored green spaces closer to home. 75% of students said that Eco Challenge had made a difference to them. 41% of young people thought more about the environment and around a quarter gave examples of practical action.

OPENING EYES TO FAMILIAR PLACES

A primary purpose of Eco Challenge was to use the inspirational experiences and locations of the residential to awaken interest, and then through working with local environmental organisations raise awareness of local green spaces and actively engage the students in their home area. Young people indicated that they used local parks, their own gardens and playing fields more following their involvement in Eco Challenge.

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To quote one of my students (who has never been out of Grimsby) on top of Castle Crag, Borrowdale: ‘Is this England? Why has no one told me this was here? Did I not listen?’ That just says it all and will stay with me forever Teacher

My favourite was Long Mynd we were walking in the clouds – I’d never been in the clouds before Student



I can't believe you can have a place like this, with the tree next to the big block of flats – amazing! Student commenting on Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park during a follow-up session

The opportunity for students to work at their local nature reserve made them visit a place that was very close, but which they would usually just walk past and never go in! Teacher

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Partnerships and Action

One of the outstanding successes of Eco Challenge was initiating relationships between schools and local organisations, and coordinating sessions so that students got actively involved – 666 sessions in school grounds or in nearby green spaces were delivered by a network of over 45 local organisations.

Students got a real buzz from the practical activities during the residential and the follow-up sessions. They learnt how to use tools and then put this knowledge into action whether through tree planting, coppicing, learning how to make stiles, build footpaths or bird boxes. This enjoyment and enthusiasm often translated into schemes back in the school grounds or in local green spaces which far exceeded original plans – all due to increased interest and confidence of students and school staff, supported by the local environmental organisation and Eco Challenge project staff.

These plans and activities often rippled out to engage and involve the wider school community, e.g. ongoing work with follow-up session providers to offer opportunities regularly to other cohorts of students within the school, such as those studying land-based skills or following an alternative curriculum. Both residential and local activities inspired some teachers to integrate elements into their 'day to day' teaching, and to share information with other colleagues.

90% of schools completed all elements of the programme and 31% indicated that they wish to continue working with the local organisation after the project. Contacting the environmental organisations six months after the project finished, we found that 35% of the environmental organisations had carried out some further work with the school.



I come across some of the young people from time to time, and they are always much more comfortable being outdoors and doing things in nature than when we first met them Follow-up session provider one year after the project finished

When a 'rough, tough, inner city lad' prepares a design for a scented flower bed you know you have made an impact Teacher

Students were involved in the design of the new school build. They surprised us with their determination to make school eco-friendly Teacher

Having an Eco-Group is critically important because school can be a quite wasteful place and I think it's up to us to sort it out. It makes you feel like you're giving the polar bear a helping hand – what more could a 14 year old want? Student

Students took part in a 'switch off fortnight' upon return to school, encouraging staff and students to think more about energy use and waste. Also, some students have used the local park and its play area for the first time Teacher



Students have a sense of ownership of a woodland that was previously regarded as insignificant and for some threatening
Teacher

What did the students achieve?

IN SCHOOL

✓ Food growing ✓ Habitat creation – tree planting, wildflower meadow, bug hotels, bird boxes, bird feed stations and pond creation or maintenance ✓ Creation of willow walks and domes, and an outdoor classroom with a range of habitats to be used by the whole school for studying ecology ✓ Improving the outdoor environment for people – sensory gardens, planters and seating from recycled timber ✓ Starting eco clubs, gardening clubs or seeking Eco Schools status ✓ Energy efficiency and sustainability projects and campaigns to engage the whole school community – recycling of paper and printer cartridges, energy reduction – turn of the light campaigns, addressing litter throughout the school.

IN THE LOCAL AREA

✓ Practical tasks in local nature reserves or green areas such as coppicing, tree planting, scrub clearance, path creation ✓ Visits to learn good practice, e.g. habitat creation, pond or woodland management was then transferred into school based projects ✓ Visits to recycling facilities ✓ Surveying, e.g. trees, birds, otters and pollution monitoring ✓ Involvement in community based food growing and allotments ✓ Intergenerational gardening in the local community.



I can't believe I planted 28 trees – thanks Jenna! I enjoyed planting the most, we had a laugh and helped save the environment. Next we're going to get more recycling done in school
Student

They have really enjoyed the hard work and have also realised how they can transform their local spaces with some determination and creativity

Follow-up session provider

Small groups of pupils are now regular volunteers for their local community gardens. They help with weeding and planting, etc., during school and out of school hours
Teacher

The residential provided a lot of ideas for integrating science and ecology with outdoor education and adventurous activities, and the follow-up activities have provided a wealth of ideas for new conservation/ecology activities that can be used in the future
Teacher

More staff are now taking students out during lessons to look at the habitats around school and using the facilities at the school's eco lodge. A school gardening club has been set up
Teacher



Supporting students, teachers and schools

Support by dedicated Eco Challenge project officers, working closely with schools throughout the programme, helped teachers plan and organise the residential and the follow-up sessions. This was valuable for teachers with limited experience of organising a residential. Briefing meetings for students, staff and parents were held and helped provide information and reassurance, often breaking down barriers to participation, e.g. linked to special religious, dietary or medical requirements.

Working closely with teachers to gather information about the nature and needs of the group meant the programme could be adapted as appropriate. Information was shared with both residential and follow-up session staff. This ability to adapt to meet requirements, e.g. attending Mass on a Sunday morning, providing Halaal marshmallows for toasting at the bonfire, prayer time, special diets and modifying activities in response to the group ability, was commended by teachers.

This support gave schools with no track record of residentials and out-of-classroom learning the confidence to participate. There is some evidence that Eco Challenge has helped schools realise the benefit of learning outside-the-classroom, whether on a residential or involvement at a local level. A third of schools who had never taken part in an FSC residential before Eco Challenge, have attended further FSC residential courses.

Building critical relationships

Spending time away from school in different surroundings also helped student/staff relationships. Barriers were overcome and students realised that staff are human too! There was evidence that these relationships continued following Eco Challenge, with students being more willing to share problems and to seek help from teachers.



Students with behavioural issues have shown improvements in behaviour after building up relationships with staff on the trip Teacher

One pupil was in danger of being excluded, but since the trip has been amazing. He even got 'most improved student of the year' Teacher



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Field Studies Council
Head Office, Preston Montford
Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 1HW
Telephone: 01743 852100

www.field-studies-council.org

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