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# Climate Change: a real threat to our future

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MEDWAY YOUTH COUNCIL  
ANNUAL YOUTH CONFERENCE REPORT  
2019



*TEL: 01634 338748*  
*WEB: [medwayyouthcouncil.co.uk](http://medwayyouthcouncil.co.uk)*  
*TWITTER: @MYC\_Medway*  
*FACEBOOK: Medway Youth Council*  
*INSTAGRAM:*  
*[medway\\_youth\\_council](https://www.instagram.com/medway_youth_council)*

YOU MAY NOT HAVE THE VOTE, BUT YOU DO HAVE A VOICE

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## This report aims to outline the findings and recommendations of Medway Youth Council's Annual Conference 2019

### 'Climate Change: A Real Threat to Our Future'

#### Opening from Anna McGovern Medway Youth Council Chair.

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues we face as a global populace, with this particularly being more profound to young people being the future generation of adults in society. This was what ignited the inspiration behind our Annual Conference for 2019.

Young people from across Medway, representing their schools, were invited to attend our Annual Conference, which ran from 9:00 to 15:00 at MidKent College, Gillingham. The day was segmented into three workshops, each tackling an issue within climate change on a local and national scale, followed by a Q&A panel delivered by climate change professionals in the afternoon. The aim of the Conference was to educate young people on the key topics within climate change, and to show them how even small changes in their everyday lifestyle could make a massive difference towards this cause.



Following the Conference, myself and our Workshop Leads have developed this Conference report which is to highlight the key findings of our Conference, to publicise young people's views towards climate change, and to set out our action points based on the findings on our Conference for us to deliver upon.

A significant takeaway one can recognise from the report is how 75% of Medway's young people consider climate change to be a "very critical issue", only highlighting the pivotal importance this issue is for young people in Medway.

On behalf of the Medway Youth Council, I would like to thank you for taking the time to read our report. We look forward to tackling our action points and to work with key decision-makers in the community to ensure these are set up on a widespread local level.

## Who are we?

Medway Youth Council is an organisation of passionate young people from across the Medway towns, dedicated to giving young people a voice and promoting their role in our communities.

We are a wholly inclusive organisation, representing a wide range of young people aged 11-18, from a variety of schools and youth groups. We campaign on behalf of young people exploring prominent issues that concern young people in Medway such as transport, mental health, and bullying and national issue such as gang crime and health. Medway Youth Service supports the Youth Council in its work.

## The Conference

Medway Youth Council holds an Annual Conference, with young people from across Medway attending. We send Invitations to every school, inviting a small number of students between the ages of 11 and 18 (years 7 to 13) and accompanying staff to attend the conference. We also invited Local Councillors, decision makers and guests who are involved with the theme for the conference.

This year, we decided to look at the topical issue of Climate Change. The conference titled 'Climate Change: A Real Threat to Our Future' took place at Mid Kent College in November 2019. We planned three separate workshops for the young people attending. This was followed by lunch and a question and answer session with an invited panel.

## Climate Change: A Real Threat to Our Future

During the summer of 2019, we debated topics for the annual conference and Climate change and the environment was something that Medway Youth Council members felt passionate about. Following the 2019 Make Your Mark result which highlighted that the majority of young people in Medway and nationally felt Climate Change was an important issue, we knew that we had made the right decision to campaign on this topic. The following workshop ideas came from the planning work that members did to explore their knowledge and concerns.

### *Climate Change: The Impact on Nature and the Environment*

The aim of this workshop was to identify what existing knowledge young people in Medway had on how climate change affects nature and the environment, as well as exploring what they felt were the most important issues surrounding climate change. The activities included a general quiz, a diamond-9 activity to asked young people to rank climate change impacts to see what they considered the most important and a quiz sheet about how endangered and extinct animals.

### *Who is responsible for Climate Change?*

The aim of this workshop was to explore the current ecological crisis and the role of individuals, agencies and communities in equally tackling it. We asked the young people attending to consider who was responsible for Climate Change and to comment on who the biggest contributors are to the current situation.

### *How can YOU take direct action to tackle the Climate Crisis?*

The aim of this workshop was to see what young people knew regarding climate change and to encourage them to take direct action to see what changes they can make as individuals. The activities included matching up carbon footprints to energy sources, a quiz on human impact and a group activity to decide on the issues which have been raised by Greta Thunberg and ranked in relevance to the climate crisis.

## Workshop 1: Climate Change: The Impact on Nature and the Environment

Each group took part in three activities each, all designed to test their knowledge and to encourage discussion within the groups and hopefully introduce ideas that they had not thought of before.

### **Levels of Animal Populations**

First, we wanted to understand how much young people understood about the effects of deforestation, poaching and animal trafficking on habitat loss and population size decrease. This activity Figure 1. Particularly covers the perception and knowledge of the young people towards the populations of rare species.

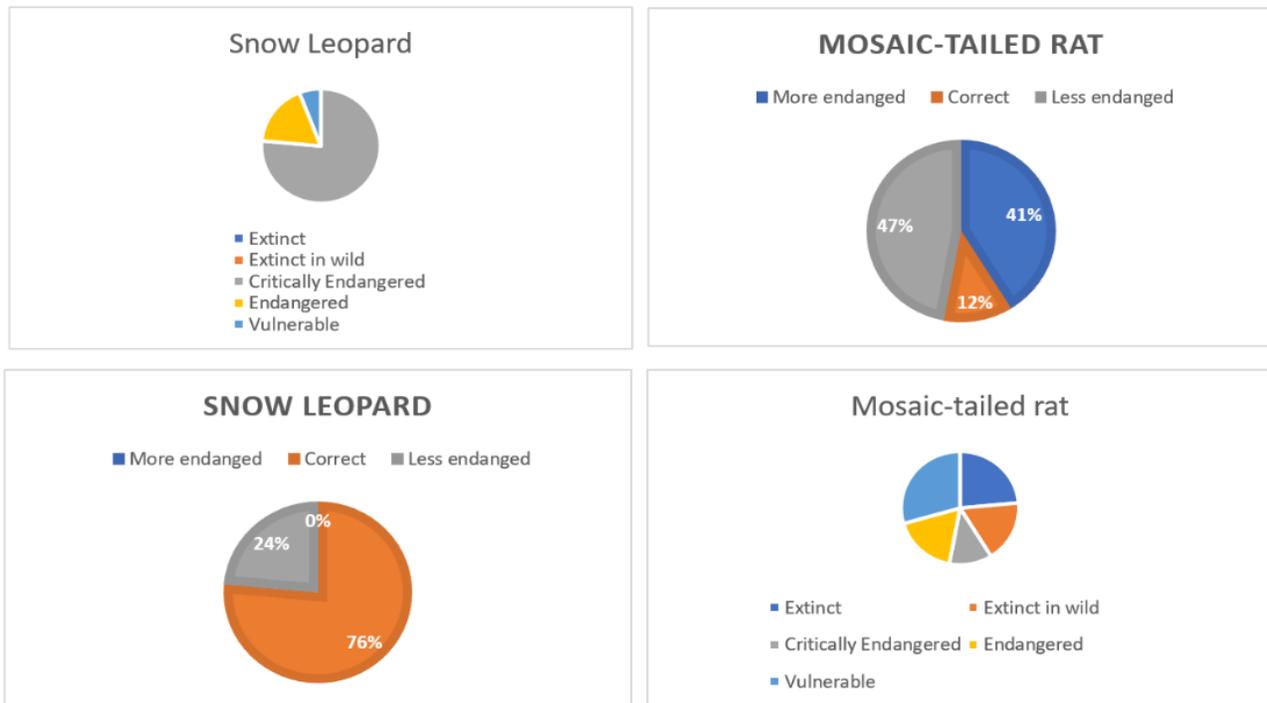
For example, the snow leopard is widely covered by the media. Many young people assumed that they were close to extinction, due to the repetitive request for donations in return for a soft toy. Therefore 13 out of the 17 groups thought that the snow leopards' numbers were <250 when in fact it was around 4000-6000 left in the wild.

Moreover, for both the Amur leopard and the Sumatran rhino, an improved score of seven out of the 17 groups identified it correctly as critically endangered. A positive note would be that for all of the groups attending they correctly identified some of the answers suggesting that the young people

Animal		Decide how many are left				
		Extinct	Extinct in the wild	Critically endangered Less than 250	Endangered Less than 25,000	Vulnerable 10,000
	Cross River Gorilla			✓		✓
	Bramble Cay mosaic-tailed rat					✓
	Sumatran Rhino		✓			X Critical
	Amur Leopard					X Critical
	North Atlantic Whale				✓	
	Snow Leopard			✓		

**Figure 1**

within Medway have some understanding of the effects of climate change on wildlife.



As can be seen from the data above, young people were far more successful when judging how endangered they thought the snow leopard was. When asked, many young people said they had seen adverts on the TV, highlighting the fact that the snow leopard is critically endangered. On the other hand, the Mosaic Tailed Rat (which only went extinct in Australia in 2019) was far less common knowledge amongst young people with only 12% of the participants correctly identifying it was extinct.

Overall, we found that for this investigation, young people are less knowledgeable about the animals that the media does not show, or are taught about in schools. Following this Medway Youth Council feels that society needs to be more aware about the importance of interdependence of human survival as well as animals' the environment needs protection. Amongst the feedback we received, was that the government should do even more to protect natural habitats. The smallest extinctions add up and will soon affect us, for example, a practical solution offered by a year 7, "Schools should build beehives".

**Diamond 9** - Next, we wanted to ask each group how they would prioritise the impacts of climate change and what they think could be done to mitigate any future consequences. This activity Figure 2 was our opportunity to talk to each group and walk through their step-by-step thought process, open to any ideas that they had about the impacts.

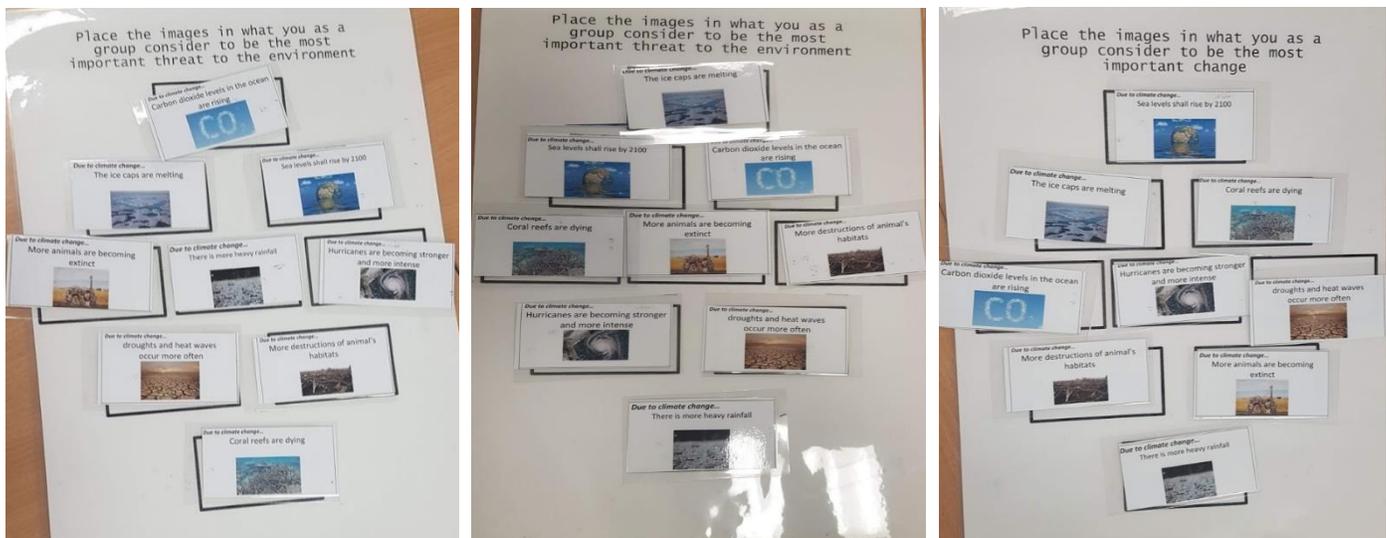


Figure 2

Some of the young people who attended out workshop said:

- “This has a domino effect since the globe is warmed which melts the ice caps causing flooding and so habitat loss.”
- “I think the sea levels one is more important because it destroys habitats and buildings which costs lots to rebuild.”

This activity highlighted some areas where young people were more aware of how climate change affects ecosystems, CO<sub>2</sub> levels and the coral reefs.

Overall, in this activity, young people said that they felt that the rise in CO<sub>2</sub> levels was the most important change and that the increase in rainfall was the least important.

**General Trivia Quiz** - Our last activity was a general trivia quiz. We wanted to see how the workshop attendees had remembered and had noted the information we had provided so far, but also to dispel some myths or preconceptions they may have a bout climate change. The task was simple,

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go to the left side of the room if you think the statement mentioned is false and to the right if it is true, however if you are unsure stay in the middle. From this, we were able to conclude that young people were very knowledgeable and got majority of the questions right. However, there was one statement, which very few people got right. This was 'On average, the sea level rises by \_\_\_cm every year'. When asked, many young people thought, "The value was too low".

We questioned the young people why they had responded to the statements in their chosen way, here are some of the replies:

- "No one makes a big deal out of recycling anyway," suggesting despite the methods put in place, people still don't realise the true consequences of these actions.
- "You could email factories to tell them to slow down or stop production as a way to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> levels"
- "I don't really know; but imagine that more developed countries are generally better at being environmentally friendly"

Conclusion - Overall, we have seen through the rigorous data collection that not everyone who attended is fully aware of the extent of this current situation. In relation to the disastrous consequences of climate change, but more than that, people should realise that now isn't the time to dwell on how much detail someone understands about climate change, but that they should start taking action to prevent the fast approaching effects.

The conference elicited many positive ideas, for example like animal sanctuaries, new parks, stopping housing developments and planting trees in urban towns and cities around Medway.

From the data collected at the conference, we as a youth council believe it should be down to local government to ensure young people are aware of the environmental impacts on all ecosystems. The diamond nine revealed that young people generally considered atmospheric aspects as paramount, often neglecting the importance of other factors such as the destruction of coral habitats. In addition, the general knowledge quiz displayed that young people have some understanding of common climate concerns, however if they were more informed this would allow them to take more action to prevent the

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intensity of the climate crisis. If schools and youth organisation were to provide this, it could go a long way to inform the youth of Medway and allow them to change the future.

Despite our valid results, if we were to continue this investigation we would want to ask more people, not just young people, about their own knowledge of climate change and the environment. We would also include a wider variety of animals to see assess the knowledge held can transcend the advertisements that are shown on media.

## Workshop 2: Who is responsible for Climate Change?

Our first priority was to introduce the question of consumer responsibility, to what extent can we expect consumers to be responsible for the environmental implications of the products they buy? Conversely, how much influence do businesses and governments have in the consumer choices we make and our individual carbon footprints? Who should be responsible for acting first on the climate crisis?

In introducing these questions, we first presented young people with a card sorting activity in smaller table sized groups, asking them to predict and then rank from largest to smallest the carbon footprints of common consumer products such as a pair of trainers, a cheeseburger, a large cup of coffee and a smartphone. With this, we ultimately aimed to test young people's awareness of the carbon footprint of their choices and lifestyle.

Throughout all three sessions, no single group managed correctly to order all the items. The most common misconception; surrounded the relative carbon footprint of one litre of gasoline. All but one group out of seventeen individuals believed it to be in the top three from the list of items, despite it being only fifth in the list. Often placed last were the two clothing items on

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the list, which have some of the highest carbon footprints. Only five groups successfully ranked the smartphone as having creating the highest carbon emissions, subsequently many participants were surprised to find out that was the case - more commonly ranked near or at the top were the footprints of a litre of gasoline and a cheeseburger. This is unsurprising, considering the harmful environmental impacts of meat and fossil fuel consumption are widely publicized in the media - it was evident that young consumers need a wider awareness of the environmental impact of their lifestyles.

Following on from this we then asked participants to look over a series of personal lifestyle/consumer changes such as eating less meat, switching to renewable energy and buying sustainably sourced food and clothes. We asked them about the prohibitive factors stop young people from making a choice. We asked them to consider what would make them change. The aim of this task was to get participants to appreciate that consumer behaviour can be influenced by other factors/the role of other entities and equally to find out what young people think are in general the biggest factors discouraging greener consumer behaviour.

This activity generated a productive discussion in which many participants demonstrated that they had some considerable awareness of existing measures such as green energy subsidies. It was evident that participants felt that governments had a large role to play in incentivising greener consumer behaviour - the most common barriers listed were cost and a lack of awareness of certain lifestyle changes.

The debated suggestions were a tax on meat, more urban low emissions zones/ taxes for fossil fuel burning vehicles, cheaper bus fares and public information campaigns and corporate advertising initiatives. Broadly, participants acknowledged that taxation/government intervention and the actions of corporations could influence consumer behaviour positively although there were concerns about whether certain measures would hit poorer people disproportionately.

Lastly, participants were involved in a more open discussion about responsibility - for the factors in the previous task they were asked to choose who they thought needed to act first between the government, businesses and consumers. We wanted them to weigh up some of the ideas/solutions raised in the previous task and judge which of the three parties could do the most to help the issue. We did this by getting participants to go to different labelled corners of the room corresponding to the three groups. What we observed was that, whilst acknowledging there was lots governments and corporations could do, many young people still felt that the onus should be on individuals to make changes. Usually individuals was the most popular category. The exceptions were with green transport and the issue of single use plastics. Young people felt governments should be most responsible for improving the environmental impact of our transport network. The conference attendees felt that corporations such as food producers and retailers had the biggest role to play in reducing the use of single use plastics. Opting for recyclable or biodegradable packaging and incentivising shoppers to buy certain products unpackaged i.e. loose fruit and veg through advertising, albeit whilst many also felt governments could do a lot to aid this through regulation.

Nonetheless, when it came to the question of who was most responsible for the climate crisis, most of the participants felt we as individuals were most responsible for the environmental impacts of our lifestyles and thus equally carried the responsibility for reducing them. Young people acknowledged there was much government and corporations could do to encourage greener behaviours in individuals and equally, because of the first exercise, that young consumers could be better informed on how their choices effect the environment. The principal recommendation from our workshop then would be that both Medway Youth Council and the council work towards increasing public awareness of the environmental cost of common purchases and correspondingly promote positive lifestyle changes.

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## Workshop 3: How can YOU take direct action to tackle the Climate Crisis?

The workshop was centred around personal change and direct action, concerning the issue of climate change. We wanted people to think about what they could change in their lifestyle to become more environmentally aware, and what is preventing them from doing so.

The workshop started with a small icebreaker. There were six laminated 'carbon' footprints of different sizes. Each one represented a source of energy, (coal, natural gas, solar, hydropower, nuclear energy and wind energy.) The groups had to match up the energy source to the size footprint. The size footprint represented the grams of CO<sub>2</sub> produced per kilowatt per hour. Overall, the groups were very knowledgeable on this topic. Nearly every group identified coal as the most CO<sub>2</sub> producing energy source, followed by confusion about which was larger, hydro or solar. People were also very surprised at how big the gap was between the different carbon footprints; natural gas, which was second largest after coal, produced 442g more CO<sub>2</sub> than large scale solar power. We are confident that we achieved the desired effect in showing people that solar, wind, hydro and nuclear energy are far more sustainable sources of energy.

The first activity was a quiz based around human decisions and actions that affect climate change. For example, one of the questions was 'on average how many litres of water is saved by having a 10-minute shower, rather a bath?', (the answer being 66.5). The aim for this activity was to get everyone to realize how their actions have consequences; we are all individuals', but part of a global problem. Around half of young people guessed that 2.5 billion coffee cups are thrown away each year. This surprised us as we thought that they would not guess so high. We realized from this how aware young people are of this problem. Perhaps then, if young people were given more encouragement from schools or the coffee shops themselves, they would be more motivated to take a reusable cup or sit in and drink from a mug or glass.

We also chose an activity based around Greta Thunberg because we thought she was a prime example of how much action a young person can take. For this activity, we did some research on some of her most significant accomplishments. We chose a range of facts to include such as ‘published a book on climate change’ and ‘she is a vegan’. We asked attendees to rank the facts in importance and relevance to climate change.

This activity generated mixed responses, however around 50% of groups agreed that her most important action was the school strike for climate. When asked why, the general response was “it was the action that started up the global movement”. Other groups put the fact that aged 16, she spoke at the UN climate summit and had the courage to criticize world leaders and talk passionately about climate change.

Young people did not think that the fact that Greta is a vegan was very important; however, there is evidence that reducing the amount of meat produced and eaten is a key way to impact upon the environment. More work is required to support young people to explore the relationship between food production and the environment.

The third activity was arguably the most challenging for the workshop groups. Each group had a pack of laminated items, for example, juice cartons, coffee grounds and food items. They then had to decide where the items should go, a normal rubbish bin, a compost bin or the appropriate recycling bag. Many people thought that plastic straw were recyclable and so put them with the recycling.



This prompted some students in group two to express the need for companies to put clearer label on their products, indicating whether they are recyclable or not, so as to avoid error and confusion. Young people had good knowledge of the fact that items that decompose, such as banana peel, would go in the compost bin.

Learning that compost bins were a sustainable way of disposing of food waste, a few groups discussed the need for more compost bins free of charge.

Upon reflection, we feel that it would be advantageous for all young people to have recycling education for this to be encouraged across schools. All schools could facilitate this by providing all types of bins and promoting recycling. If schools provided compost bins in school halls, any food waste could go towards providing compost for the school grounds.

The final activity focused on the voice of the young people. We encouraged them to reflect on everything that they had learnt in the workshops and come up with their own ideas for making Medway a more environmentally aware place to live. The ideas put forward were as follows:

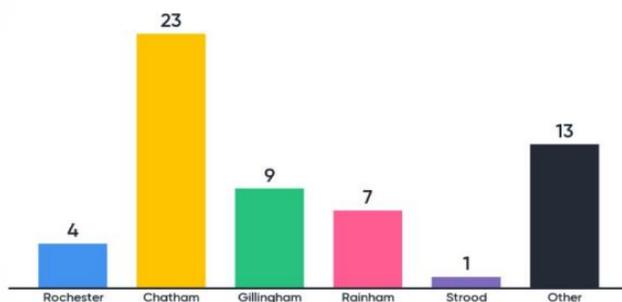


- Make more use of hydropower
- Free public transport
- Free reusable mugs in schools
- Increase the number of public recycling bins
- Free use of point of hire bicycles
- Solar energy in schools
- Sensor lights in schools to decrease energy consumption from lights being left on
- Schools should be on the green tariff
- More education within schools about the consequences of climate change
- More trees planted
- Better promotion of recycling
- Encourage the reuse of glass bottles
- Cafes and restaurants should use metal straws
- Volunteer groups to pick up rubbish
- Reward systems for recycling
- Make it clearer which items are recyclable

## Pre-Panel Questions

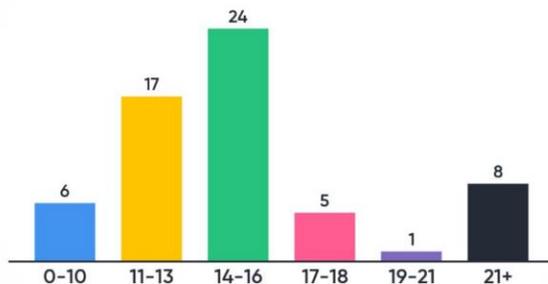
During the afternoon session, all the young people attending had the opportunity to answer questions using Mentimeter? Young people used their phones to answer these questions and the data collected is directly from the young people who took part.

### Which area of Medway do you live in?



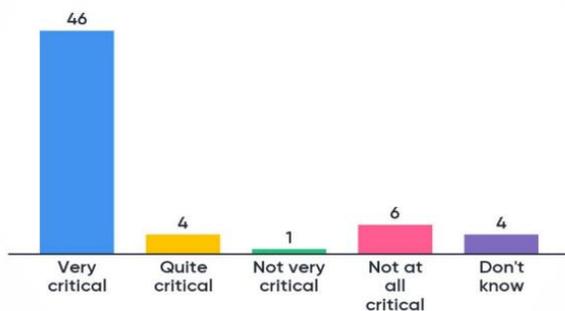
We asked the young people who attended which part of Medway they were from to ensure that we had representation from all over the towns.

### Which age category do you fit in?



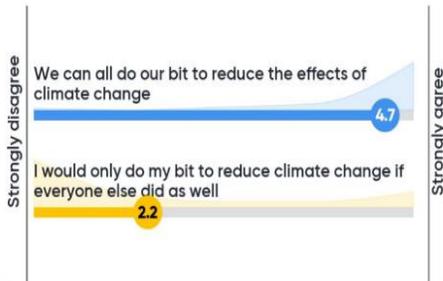
We asked young people their age to ensure that we get a good representation of the people we represent (which is 11-18 and 11-25 for people with additional needs). We covered all age groups, with 14-16 being the largest category.

### How critical is the issue of climate change?



From this sample, it is clear to conclude that the majority young people view climate change as a critical issue today, with 46 people out of 61 saying it is a very critical.

### What is your level of agreement on the following statements?



From this question, we can see that young people believe everyone can do their bit to reduce climate change with people giving an average score of 4.7 out of 5.

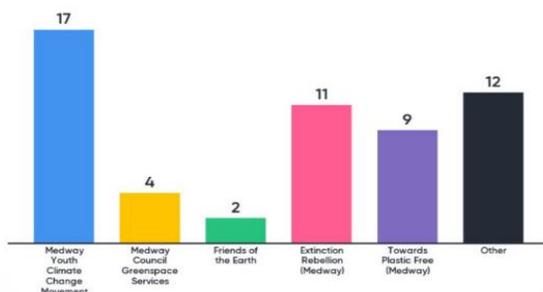
Young people also gave a 2.2 score out of 5 when saying that they would only do their bit if someone else did it. This shows young people are willing to change even if other people aren't.

### What is your level of trust on information about climate change, if you were to receive it from the following?



There was evenly split when it came to this question, however young people trust scientists more on information on climate change, whereas young people trust government bodies the least.

### Which community environmental groups have you heard of?



Majority of young people have heard of the newly formed 'Medway Youth Climate Change Movement' (MYCCM), which is very good as this is another youth group. The rest were split evenly apart from 'Medway Council Greenspace Services' with only 4 people knowing about it and only 2 people hearing about 'Friends of the Earth'.

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## The Panel Q&A

The afternoon consisted of a question and answer panel session in which students were able to openly ask questions regarding the climate crisis and the days discussions. The aim was to allow attendees the chance to delve deeper into the topic and resolve any questions raised during the morning workshops in conversation with activists and professionals/experts.

On the panel was Peter W. Piper Professor of Molecular Biology, University of Sheffield a climate scientist, conservationist and member of Extinction Rebellion, a local member of UK Youth Parliament, Oliver Branch, and the executive director of Medway Youth Climate Change Movement, Alexander Jordan. From Medway Council Nathaniel Prodger, Environmental Protection Officer and Vicki Emrit, Climate Change Co-ordinator Environmental Services.

We felt that it would be especially valuable to give young people access to such professional insight and consequently to the academic and scientific base of the issue. The panellists discussed both the council's aspirations and current work in attempting to tackle the climate crisis, including the declaration of a climate emergency in April 2019. Some of the feedback we received after last year's conference criticized the lack of young people on our panel and we were eager to heed that criticism and to elevate young voices as is the mission of MYC, so two young people were included on the panel this year.

The panel were asked a wide variety of questions, from the practical to the political. This included whether they believed developing countries should be held equally accountable [relative to the developed world] for their greenhouse gas emissions, to which, whilst not all panellists offered an answer. The panellist was particularly illuminating and explained the disparity in carbon emissions between the developing and developed worlds. It was explained that the wealthiest 10% of the world's population approximately produce 50% of the world's carbon emissions and that in the production of food alone ~1500 litres of fossil fuel are needed to produce our food which is significantly greater than for much of the developing world. It was thus

agreed by the panel that there was a responsibility on developed and wealthier countries with the resources to act to do so and equally for them to help developing nations with fewer resources to invest in changes such as their fossil fuel emissions.

Whilst this was a very specific, political question, other questions were more general, asking what the effects of climate change would be and what the biggest steps we could take as individuals to tackle it. The panel described a world with much more common and severe drought and famine, decreasing crop yields (~10 % for each degree Celsius of warming), up to 1.5 billion people displaced by 2050 and the potential for more deadly heatwaves similar to that in Europe in 2003 which killed more than 70,000. The potential drastic loss of biodiversity was also described.

On what we can do to tackle it, the professor said first and foremost the greatest things we can do practically to tackle the climate crisis is to fly as little as possible and eat less meat. He also referred to the power of education and activism, to strive to educate yourself better on the climate and to make your voice heard in campaigning for a greener society. The rest of the panel largely agreed, whilst from a council perspective the value of recycling and finding greener travel alternatives from public transport to car sharing. Alexander Jordan additionally raised the value of student-led movements and the work of MYCCM promoting youth climate action in Medway.

The final key question asked was what they themselves were doing to tackle the climate crisis. This gave an opportunity for the council representatives to talk about their work, since the declaration of a climate emergency. The council representative informed the audience of the council's car share scheme as well as the work of the waste management team in reducing landfill waste. The Green Schools award was also highlighted and with it the work with 13 Medway schools to facilitate air monitoring and more recycling and sustainable travel alternatives to school. There was also reference to plans to better promote and better connect different modes of public transport. The audience were invited to find out more by visiting the council's website.



## Summary and further actions

### Summary

Overall, we believe that our conference provided an effective platform for the young people of Medway to voice their views on issues affecting climate change. With the use of teamwork and carefully planned workshops, we were able to gather a reliable representative range of feedback from young people. This has helped to inform the Medway Youth Council on views of young people, enabling us to effectively represent and work on these issues. Most of the feedback received was positive with young people praising the work of MYC.

## Further Actions

In response to MYC Annual Conference 2019, and following the publication of this conference report, we have put forward the following further actions:

- MYC will work with schools and community groups to conduct an annual audit of the waste they produce, how much they recycle and other actions to support climate change and the environment.
  - Following this, in partnership with Medway Council, MYC will suggest changes to improve recycling reduce non-recyclable waste and encourage other positive environmental changes. We will also work in partnership to promote classroom climate education. All progress will be reviewed annually alongside the audit, supported by MYC members, school councils and community groups
  - MYC will encourage education that helps young people share knowledge with their families to improve recycling and making choices to help the environment.
  - MYC will revisit these actions at each full council and members will build links with their schools to deliver the audit.
  - The Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools has met with Medway Youth Council and he has agreed to support them with their aims and objectives, and school engagement.
- If you would like to get in touch with the Medway Youth Council to assist us in achieving the above, please contact:

[www.medwayyouthcouncil.com](http://www.medwayyouthcouncil.com)

**Medway Youth Council, Gun Wharf, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR.**

**Via [mycchair@gmail.com](mailto:mycchair@gmail.com)**

**Twitter: [@MYC\\_Medway](https://twitter.com/MYC_Medway)**

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OUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
REPORT**