



Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: A 2010–15 Progress report, HC 885 Wednesday 25 February 2015

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Members present: Joan Walley (Chair), Neil Carmichael, Martin Caton, Zac Goldsmith, Dr Matthew Offord, Mrs Caroline Spelman, Dr Alan Whitehead, Simon Wright

Questions 180–235

Witnesses: **Jamie Agombar**, Head of Sustainability, National Union of Students, **Ryan Bruce**, Office of Rebecca Harris MP, Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme, **Shay Miah**, Hartlepool Member of Youth Parliament, UK Youth Parliament, and **Calin Epure**, My Life, My Say gave evidence.

Q180 Chair: I am going to start our session this afternoon on the progress report the Environment Audit Select Committee is doing. We are looking at where we are with the environment and what the hopes are for the future in terms of environmental policy. We are going to be presenting what we call our progress report to Parliament before we finish but we felt it was important, if we are looking to the future, that we should make sure that we hear from younger people and that the voice of young people is included in any recommendations our Committee might make.

If any of you walked along the Committee corridor just now, you would have seen a massive queue of people waiting to get into the Treasury Select Committee. The Environmental Audit Select Committee does not always have that same degree of profile. Our view is that in the future that is just going to have to change, for reasons I suspect all of us would probably agree on. What we wanted to do was explore thinking about the future, the environment and future generations.

Obviously the hearing we are having this afternoon will inform our report. We feel very privileged that we have the four organisations you each represent here this afternoon. We know very well that you are all doing key work in this field. Members of my Committee will perhaps want to come in and ask certain questions of you, but what we would like to do first of all is give each of you a couple of minutes to give a sense of what your organisation is, why it is important and what your priorities are for the work that you are currently doing for 2015 and looking to the future, long after I will have been retired from Parliament.

Who wants to start? You are all looking to Jamie. Perhaps we will start at the top and work down, shall we, Jamie?

Jamie Agombar: I am Jamie Agombar, from the National Union of Students, which is a confederation of about 600 student unions in the UK. We call ourselves the national voice of students. We do quite a lot on sustainability these days. Traditionally, it was a very reactive approach—we reacted to what students didn't like and tried to work with those companies. These days we do a lot more proactively, so engaging students to help them green their student unions, their institutions and, increasingly, the communities as well.

From a behaviour-change focus, we have moved quite rapidly to an institutional-change focus. We are trying to ensure that sustainability is not just about doing less bad on campus, not just about burning less fossil fuel or throwing less waste away; but it is about embedding it into the core educational purpose, the teaching and learning, ensuring that students turn out as part of the solution to the problems that we face rather than just part of the problem.

We have various programmes we are working on to do that. We feel we are quite well placed to do it and the reason we do it is because students want us to do it. There is a very clear student demand and a latent interest in sustainable development.

Q181 Chair: Thank you. I will turn next to Shay Miah, Hartlepool Member of the UK Youth Parliament.

Shay Miah: I am Shay Miah, from Hartlepool. I am part of the Youth Parliament, which has over 3,000 young people involved in youth democracy. We are a voice for young people. We get elected; there is a Member of the Youth Parliament from each constituency, and we work with the Government and the local authority to make change better for young people.

On what we are doing currently: we had an election just a few weeks ago that had comments for the main debate of raising the living wage and also mental health. Locally, I am working with the local authority to look at some ways to promote more recycling in schools and the education system itself as they engage in that system there. We have a group of young people who are eagerly committed to know more about the environment and what they have to do and we are going to work on that throughout next year.

Q182 Chair: As a Member of the Youth Parliament for Hartlepool, how much do you relate to what is going on in Hartlepool and how much you relate to the wider work of the Youth Parliament?

Shay Miah: We always feed back our work once every month through, a survey that we do. The work that we do in Hartlepool keeps it local, but we try to get the national aims to the local standards so everything goes back up as well.

Chair: Of course, that is the struggle that every MP tries to balance.

Shay Miah: Yes, indeed.

Q183 Chair: Ryan Bruce, you are part of the Speaker's scheme for traineeships.

Ryan Bruce: Yes. I am part of the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme, which was set up by Hazel Blears and the Speaker, basically to try to give people who would not have the chance to follow the more traditional route of getting into politics the chance to work

in Parliament. We do not have any specific environmental remit, but we work across all political spectrums. There is a member of this year's cohort working with Ed Davey, the Energy Secretary, so he obviously has a lot to do with energy policy. I think that schemes like the one I am on and the House of Commons Apprenticeship Scheme are fantastic ways of bringing young people into politics and getting them engaged in something they might previously have felt a bit more distant from, nothing to do with them. I think it is a fantastic scheme to be able to bring a different background into politics.

Q184 Chair: You would like to be here?

Ryan Bruce: I would, yes, eventually.

Chair: Would you say it has been transformational?

Ryan Bruce: For me, personally, yes; it has been absolutely incredible. I had always wanted to get into politics and last year I had kind of given up on the idea that I was ever going to get into politics. I thought, "Well, it is obviously not going to happen for me. I do not have millionaire parents. I can't do unpaid internships," that sort of thing. Then one of my friends on my masters course said, "Have you seen this scheme?" I thought, "This is too good to be true." I applied for it, got it and have been here since October. It is fantastic, yes—I don't want to leave.

Q185 Chair: Thank you. Calin, My Life My Say is your organisation. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that, please?

Calin Epure: Of course. My Life, My Say is an organisation that aims at engaging young people into politics, but we act in a different way. We try to give a platform for youth to voice their concerns, their hopes and their expectations. Often we hear rhetoric that young people do not care about politics. The truth is that young people do feel disenfranchised, and, as such, we act peer to peer. We give them education, because we have a partnership with the UK Parliament and the EU Parliament, but we also give internships and the opportunity for young people to work with other young people within politics and regarding politics.

Q186 Chair: Thank you. We are going to ask some questions. The way we will run the proceedings is that you do not each have to answer every single question but catch my eye and members of the Committee will catch my eye as well, and we will conduct it as a discussion in that sense. What we wanted to have a sense of is what the political priorities of young people are, and how much do they include concerns about the environment and sustainability? Should more be being done? What is your perception of it, Calin?

Calin Epure: We have just recently started a campaign called #BeTheChange. This is regarding the elections and one of the aspects of this campaign involved grass roots. We go and talk to young people, we take photographs of them, and sometimes we ask them a simple question, "What would you do if you were PM for a day?" The interesting thing doing this is that once I engage with people, once I start talking to them, they become very passionate. They have opinions about the environment, education and health care and welfare, but almost every time the first thing I am told is, "What does it matter what I think?" A lot of young people feel their opinions no longer matter, and even though they are highly opinionated, they hesitate to participate in politics because of that reason.

Chair: So the passion is there but the question is how to connect.

Calin Epure: Exactly.

Q187 Mrs Spelman: Can I just come in on that? Calin, you used an interesting word, probably very deliberately. You said young people felt disenfranchised. That means they do not have the vote, but they do have the vote, yet they are the cohort in society that is least likely to vote. 18 to 24-year-olds are the ones who use their vote least of all. Why is that?

Calin Epure: Yes. This is the whole point of the #BeTheChange campaign. One of the aspects is that we are trying to get people to vote. This question is going in circles. It is very dangerous. Young people don't vote because they think they can't change anything. Now, they can't change anything because they don't vote and it keeps going like that. In a way this started because, if you look at Parliament, you see a lot of middle-aged, white people and that is not Britain's youth. They don't feel represented anymore and they hesitate to vote because they think, "What am I voting for?" Had they voted, would that change things? We don't know. That is what we are trying to change and see what the effect would be. What happens when more young people do vote?

Q188 Chair: Were you in any way involved in looking at what happened in Scotland in the referendum and the involvement of young people there?

Calin Epure: We were not involved as an organisation. I personally did follow the events and I think that proves the point I made earlier. When young people are given the chance and they feel they can influence politics, they become very passionate about it.

Chair: Shay, you wanted to come in.

Shay Miah: Yes, I did. To your question of why they are the people least likely to vote, they have no education in politics. I come from the northeast of England, one of the most deprived areas you could call it, with 35% living in poverty. How can we give them the education when the education system does not have political knowledge in the curriculum?

Q189 Mrs Spelman: That is definitely a problem in our country. Unlike in other European countries, there is a nervousness about teaching children about party politics because there is a fear it might turn your heads. I think you would be quite capable of deciding for yourselves, but that is definitely a problem.

Shay Miah: If we teach the basics of what Conservative is, what Labour is, what Lib Dem means and what the Government does, at least they have some knowledge and then they know how to register to vote.

Q190 Chair: Many MPs, myself included, arrange for young people's schools to come down from our constituencies to visit the Commons and to be involved in the outreach programme. Is that something you are familiar with in terms of that being accessible to young people in Hartlepool?

Shay Miah: No, we are not, because when we organise trips in schools and colleges, we pay for them ourselves. We go there with the money that we have, with no knowledge if we can get into Parliament or things like that.

Q191 Chair: Would you say that one of the lessons from that is the need for existing elected representatives, Members of the European Parliament, Members of this Parliament and locally elected councillors as well, to be connected to the Youth Parliament?

Shay Miah: Yes, I think they should be, and not only the Youth Parliament but their residents and their young people. In my constituency we don't see our MEP or our MP come to us and talk to young people.

Q192 Chair: Do they know about your existence?

Shay Miah: What MP doesn't know about the existence of the Youth Parliament?

Q193 Mrs Spelman: Have you invited them?

Shay Miah: Yes, we have invited them but they don't come. They are either busy or they are doing something else. The thing is, why should we invite them when they could just come over and tell us, "Yes, I am interested here"?

Q194 Mrs Spelman: They cannot just turn up at your school, no. They have to be invited. Because of this nervousness around turning people's minds politically, the MP or MEP has to have a formal invitation, usually through the head teacher or a form teacher.

Shay Miah: Yes. All head teachers would be keen but only if the MPs showed an interest in the young people.

Mrs Spelman: Well, you are unlucky, because I visit plenty of schools in my constituency, but at invitation.

Chair: I am going to move on to Ryan.

Ryan Bruce: I was just going to pick up on the point Mrs Spelman made. I was just about to jump to the defence of politicians. I absolutely agree with you that there is a disconnect between young people and politics, but I wonder who is failing who? Are we failing politics or is politics failing us?" There is a bit of need to meet in the middle there. Yes, politics is a hard sell to young people, but at the same time, if you are not going to engage with politics—because at the end of the day politicians need votes—and if they are not going to vote then why should politicians engage with them? There is that Catch-22 situation there.

I was very lucky in that I became hugely interested in politics when I was younger. None of my family was very political. My grandfather was very political and he was completely opposite from my political views and we have wonderful debates, but that was just an anomaly on my part. Most of my friends think, "Oh, he's off on one again about whatever." You mentioned the Scottish referendum and I think that was fantastic. I was quite heavily involved in the No campaign up in Scotland and it was a fantastic opportunity for young people, because it was an issue that mattered to them, it was something that affected them personally, and the figures were something like 80% to 90% of young people voted in the referendum.

Q195 Zac Goldsmith: Can I jump in? I get that the referendum was a fascinating and exciting thing, but it was no more important than an ordinary general election. Choosing your Government is massive. It may not be as dramatic as a breakaway from the United Kingdom, but it is a big deal for people.

Ryan Bruce: I could not agree with you more.

Zac Goldsmith: The question is why? Why do the numbers dip so dramatically when it comes to humdrum general election stuff as compared with something like the referendum in Scotland? I mean humdrum in the sense that it does not catch people's imagination in that generation as much the Scottish referendum did.

Ryan Bruce: I think that is the problem. People do see it as, "It's that group, or it's that group. How does that affect me?" If it was made clear that these are the people that will make the decisions that affect your life—I completely agree with you. Education is absolutely where that has to start. Again, there is this worry, "We can't influence and we can't say, 'This is the way you should vote'," but as you said, you can say, "This is what the Conservative party stands for. This is what the Labour party stands for. This is what your Government does. This is what your MP does." You can get children interested in politics at a young age. We were talking before about environmental issues and if you can get children involved in that by exciting things, things they respond to, fun things, then that will stay with them and that value system will go with them into secondary school and back into further education, but I think it has to start at a young age.

Chair: I am going to bring Jamie in.

Jamie Agombar: I completely agree with Ryan. Students certainly are interested in politics. They talk about politics a lot, but they are not necessarily interested in the politics that politicians talk about. We know students are not that interested in, say, Europe, but we do know they are interested in climate change.

In terms of voter turnout, I have some stats here. It was 63% of 18 to 24-year-olds in 1992 and it declined all the way until 2005, which was its low point of 37%; then it went up slightly to 44% in 2010. We are doing a bit of work with the Cabinet Office, along with other organisations, to try to get the youth vote out, but I do think there is an important issue around how you start connecting and how you bring politics to life for young people by talking to them about their issues in their language. We have seen quite a lot of opening up of politics of late, which undoubtedly will help, but I think there is also an intergenerational issue: 76% of over-65s voted in the last election and they are the ones who we hear in the media just this week are getting the good deal around continuing benefits for their TV licences and bus passes and so on. Young people, probably because they don't vote, are getting a harder deal. Again, it is a vicious circle in some respects.

Calin Epure: On the point of getting young people involved in politics, we often think about it in terms of voting but, from my experience working with My Life, My Say and working close to politics in general, there are so many ways. Politics is so much more than just voting. I have seen this personally in my university where, if I am trying to engage with some of my colleagues to debate politics, not much happens, they are a bit hesitant; but if I say, "Oh, look, my organisation is recruiting. We are reporting close to Parliament, but we're working with different aspects of politics," they show interest. The real problem

in talking to young people about politics is that it feels like you're trying to manipulate them to vote with one party or another. Why do we not concentrate on voluntary work, on work experience and on getting them engaged in politics that way? Then they can make their own decisions.

Mrs Spelman: We do that.

Q196 Chair: We have moved away from what we want to try to home in on, which is the environment. It is interesting that we have been talking about not so much the democratic process but the disengagement with democracy, but what we wanted to try to do was look at where environment and sustainability feature within all of this.

Jamie Agombar: I have a couple of stats on that for you as well. We work with DECC and we do a tracker survey. We know that about 85% of students are either worried or very worried about climate change and that has been consistent over the last four sets of data that we have done. Interestingly, climate change is an issue that they would vote on. The exact question was: would they vote for a Government that took more action on climate change? That has gone up: just two years ago it was 68%; now it is 82%. There is a strong message that this is something that will get out the vote.

Q197 Mrs Spelman: Can I ask a follow-up question on that? Do you think that is related to the fact that, from primary school upwards, climate change is on the national curriculum? Compared to my generation, for whom the concept had not yet been mooted and certainly was not part of the curriculum, children from a young age learn about the threat that climate change poses so that, compared to subsequent generations, their knowledge base is better?

Jamie Agombar: There may be some truth in that. It was not an issue necessarily when you lot were at school, because we didn't know about climate change then, but it is great that it is in the education system. I don't know how much it is in the secondary education system because I meet quite a lot of students that do not know much about climate change, but I think it is good that it is in the media. Obviously there has been a big downturn in the amount that it has been covered. We do know that young people very often follow the media in terms of their perceptions and their concerns.

Coming back to my generational issue again, the reason they are concerned about it is because they are the ones who going to inherit the problems. It is their generation that has the massive carbon headache and no money to address the problem. Not wanting to polarise the debate, but it feels like young people are getting quite a hard deal and climate change is right at the forefront of their concerns for that reason.

Q198 Mrs Spelman: Could I just probe a bit on this question because it is interesting? I have three children, so I have seen them go the whole way through the education system. Climate change is certainly taught in the relevant scientific subjects. If you are geographer, you definitely have climate change right the way up through secondary education. Could the problem be that the specialisation in secondary education means that if you do not take any subject of which climate change is an integral part—let's say that, like me, you did languages—you would miss out on the follow-up on an important subject like that? Is that

one of the problems? Did all four of you not get taught about climate change at secondary school? If you were taught about it, what were you studying?

Ryan Bruce: I think you have hit the nail on the head there when you say that unless you take certain subjects you are not going to get exposed to things like climate change. Again, I completely agree with you; there is this feeling that we are going to be the ones left to deal with the problem. If we had something in the curriculum that was specifically about climate change and not a module in your geography lesson, then it could be something that we could push far harder.

Q199 Chair: Am I reading you right that you are saying citizenship itself should be part of the curriculum in some way and that, within that, environmental issues—not just climate change but wider sustainability issues? Sorry, Simon, I am jumping a bit on your question there.

Shay Miah: Yes, I think it should be. In Hartlepool, all primary schools are eco-friendly and 20% of them are forest schools as well. They have their trees growing and the local authority has invested millions of pounds to have those forest schools as well. So we have a forest school but then, when you go to secondary school, the only subject that teaches you about climate change and the environment is geography. Citizenship does not teach you about climate change, or politics, or whatever it needs to be. Because there is no exam at the end of the citizenship course, as they call it, they do not feel it is important. Therefore, it is disregarded as just a free one-hour lesson.

Calin Epure: I think education about climate change in citizenship, for instance, is just the first step. It is very important, but what is also important is that young people have very easy access to then get engaged in that subject. For example, from experience in my home country, Romania, people who do voluntary work there always do things such as climate change, recycling and encouraging. When you start geography, you first learn about it but you need to be encouraged to go forward and then you get the voluntary work and teachers saying to you, “Look, this is a brilliant opportunity for you to get work experience and something to put on your CV.” Then they go and get involved in this, which increases their passion. They get very passionate about the subject and, once they have finished that, they will continually pursue that route.

Jamie Agombar: I was just going to draw out the difference between knowledge, skills and understanding, and attitudes and values. I know a lot of attitudes and values may well be developed during the time in college and university rather than necessarily in primary and secondary school, but there are lots of different things that we need from young people as they leave these institutions and go into positions of authority. It is more than just knowing what climate change is; they have to have a global citizenship perspective; they have to be able to think about things critically—critical thinking—and they have to think about things in an interdisciplinary manner. That is all stuff that is quite difficult even for institutions like universities to do because it is not their role to teach what to think or how to think it. It is their role to impart the knowledge and the skills. I think there is a big strong role for the informal curriculum, as we would call it—the stuff that happens outside the classroom. We are doing an interesting programme at the Students’ Green

Fund, which is funded by HEFCE, trying to do a lot more on the informal curriculum and trying to join it up and enable some of the stuff on the formal curriculum.

Picking up on your point, Caroline, about the forms of education, from the young people I talk to there isn't necessarily much continuity. They can get quite a bit at eco-school and then they might not get much in secondary, depending on what they study, and then they might get quite a bit or indeed not much in tertiary education. Having looked at what happens overseas, other Governments seem to have better strategies around education for sustainable development generally and weave it through the forms of education. Of course, we have the principle of academic freedom so we cannot tell universities what to teach, but there are ways of enabling it such as things like our Students' Green Fund. There just doesn't seem to be that joined-up continuity approach to sustainable development, which I think means that many young people miss out on whether it be skills or the attitudes and values.

Q200 Chair: You mentioned HEFCE in terms of the Green Fund. Is there a series of recommendations that should be made to HEFCE that would make this a lot easier?

Jamie Agombar: Not yet. We are delivering year 2 and we have funded 25 projects at the transformational end of the spectrum. We are currently talking to HEFCE about a second round of funding because we think it has been so transformational, but it is that sort of work that bridges the formal and the informal curriculum and enables students to have the space to think about these issues and to explore them, to develop networks and to challenge what is going on, to challenge their institutions. That is quite important. This is not just the curriculum issue, because we all know the curriculum can be well taught, if taught at all. The point you made outside was about having good teachers as well, which is really important. However, regardless of whether you are lucky enough to have it taught to you in a good way that you understand, there is still all the important stuff that happens outside, which is the arena we are into with the Students' Green Fund.

Q201 Chair: I am just now each going to ask each of you to make out a brief list of five things, in order of importance, that the Government that is going to be elected in May should be doing as far as the environment is concerned for the next five-year period. What are the first five things on your list of things to be done?

Shay Miah: There should be more initiatives for businesses and organisations to go locally rather than nationally. Tell organisations, "If you cut down on your carbon emissions we will give you a tax refund," or something like that. In Hartlepool we have a nuclear power station. We generate £33 million into the local authority and the average wage is £45,000, which they invest back into the local authority. In the region we have over 1,400 organisations or businesses that do stuff as well. I have some statistics here: they employ over 10,000 people and they generate £26 billion per year; together they comprise 50% of the UK's petrochemicals GDP. We could see the money that is there and that is generated back to the local authority, to the Government and to the GDP. We should be telling people—

Chair: That is one, so four more.

Ryan Bruce: I think we need to start taking a leading role in renewable energy. I come from Scotland. My brother works on an estate where there are huge wind farms. We are an island. We can lead the way on wave power—but not so much in solar power in Britain maybe. In a lot of places in Britain we have not been able to recover from the traditional industries falling away and I think looking at including sustainability in the economy, that is a fantastic way of bringing back jobs and revenue for the Exchequer—for Britain to take a leading stance on renewable energy like wind power, solar power and wave power.

Q202 Chair: That is at the local level.

Ryan Bruce: I think at the local level but at the national level as well. There was a report done a few years ago saying that places like the Clyde and Dundee and Bristol, where they have shipyards lying empty, those shipyards are perfectly placed to be making peripherals for wind turbines. Again, there seems to be this thing where there is no connection between the economy and the environment. Well, that is obviously rubbish. There is a connection. There are huge amounts of revenue to be generated from sustainable projects.

Q203 Chair: Two.

Calin Epure: Yes, I totally agree with that, although there are issues with renewable energy because the existing fossil fuel industry will not give up easily. My first point would be that it is most important to concentrate on a national and local level. Although climate change is a global issue, if one country does everything it can and overnight ideally, in a hypothetical scenario, becomes totally eco-friendly, the effects of climate change will still impact that country. I think the first step of the new Government should be to adapt to climate change. We have seen in late 2013 and early 2014 the floods in Britain, and the budget for climate change adaptation, instead of being used to prepare for such events—it got increased after the floods, but—

Q204 Chair: I am just going to cut you short there because we have the Climate Change Act and we have the Climate Change Adaptation Sub-Committee. I wanted to have your big vision, just very briefly a list, and then I am going to come in and delve a little bit more into the detail. Making a reality of the climate change commitments is your point.

Calin Epure: Yes, and also to prepare for the impacts of climate change because at the moment most of the budget is being used on repairs, so an anomaly happens and then you have to repair. I remember reading this report by an EU Commission that said for every €1 spent in preparation you can save up to €6 spent in repairs, and that is only considering flood damages.

Q205 Chair: All right, so adaptation over and above repair. Thank you. Jamie?

Jamie Agombar: Am I allowed one?

Chair: Yes. You can do five quick ones if you want.

Jamie Agombar: All right. I will be brief. I think something around education for sustainable development. Coming up with a strategy to ensure that sustainable development is woven through the formal and informal curriculum at all different levels

would be important. It is an interesting analogy that the average age of the team that sent man to the moon was 28. According to the literature, it was because President Eisenhower had the National Defence Education Act. Basically they saw this was a big issue that they wanted to do in response to Sputnik, and they invested in education and achieved amazing things with young people. If we were to do something like that around climate change, or indeed sustainable development, it makes you wonder what could be achieved. I think some sort of national interest in education in sustainable development would probably be my preference.

I also think that Paris next year and the leadership on that is important. We are world-leading in terms of the Climate Change Act. I don't think we are necessarily world-leading in terms of what we are doing now, but I think it is important that we go there and ensure that we get a strong outcome.

Q206 Simon Wright: I would like to go back to education. I am just going to read something. The expert panel for the Government for the national curriculum a couple of years ago "recommended that the school curriculum should develop pupils' knowledge, understandings, skills and attitudes to satisfy economic, cultural, social, personal and environmental goals including the aim to promote understanding of sustainability in the stewardship of resources locally, nationally and globally". That recommendation was not taken forward and, as a result, there is not much about sustainable development in the curriculum. Jamie, you said that it is not just about the curriculum, but would you consider the Government should review that recommendation next time the curriculum is addressed?

Jamie Agombar: Definitely.

Q207 Simon Wright: One of the issues facing schools is that there is a long list of things they should be teaching. Is this a priority for what schools should be teaching, given other competing priorities and interests that are there and could be there in the national curriculum? From a sense of priority, how important is environment and sustainable development in what schools should be teaching young people?

Shay Miah: I think that among young people, the priority of the environment is low and they have more important things to worry about such as jobs, education, going into the work world. I don't think the environment affects them as much as everything else does, but it is that thing that, once we put it in the curriculum, it makes people passionate, it gets them involved and that is what we need to do. We need get them involved and passionate and hopefully that will go further.

Q208 Simon Wright: Shay, I know the UK Youth Parliament has debated a Curriculum for Life and you call for sustainable living to be part of that. Can you just elaborate a bit on what that might mean and would that address the issue where some young people taking certain subjects would get no information?

Shay Miah: The Curriculum for Life was in fact to allow schools to teach young people about the future; it was about giving them the life experience that they need for the world of work, whether they leave school and find a job or go to college and university. The sustainable living part needs to show them how they can be cost efficient, live in a home that is warm and comfortable for them, but how they can use eco-lights to reduce their bills as a consequence and that is how it should be. That comes into geography and,

hopefully, with that the curriculum of citizenship becomes more important and more worthy for young people to be involved with, and then it goes into geography, history and then you elaborate in every subject hopefully.

Jamie Agombar: We have just done a bit of research with students in tertiary education and the priority concern for them in relation to the election is cost of living, then it is employment and further down the list, at about 45%, is sustainability/climate change. We are quite frank that this is not the priority but, if you look at the bigger-picture priorities, we find that students' concern in relation to things like climate change increases as they go through their time in university. As the education kicks in, they realise that this is a bigger priority, but the bigger picture is that we need a sustainable and viable planet and that arguably trumps any sort of short-term issues that are around and students kind of argue that point as they go through their education.

Q209 Simon Wright: How early do you think children can start to engage with issues of sustainable living and sustainable development? Is there a particular age where this might start to factor into education most helpfully?

Ryan Bruce: I think a very early age. I have a 7-year-old nephew. They go out to a local forest and that kind of thing and he came home from school once and started telling me about carbon emissions and I was flabbergasted. He was telling me things that I would expect PhD people do not know. I think if you can get them involved at a very young age by doing things, they do not feel like they are being educated to do out of the classroom. They get to go away and do something and they come back and they learn, but they take that value with them and they get more and more interested in it. If you do not instil that into them at a young age and then try to make them interested at high school, I think it is forcing the issue at that point.

Jamie Agombar: The RSPB does good work on connection to nature and that is an issue of concern to them. There is evidence that young people are not as connected to nature these days, with tablets and digital technology, but that is how I got into sustainability. It was not through anything a teacher taught me; it is that my dad used to take me out to nature reserves and I got into it that way. Eco-schools and forest schools are great for that great reason. The earlier you start with that sort of stuff the better and then embedding some of the critical challenging issues around climate change or circular economy and all that sort of stuff needs to come later once they develop those important values and those attitudes.

Q210 Simon Wright: No further questions on education. Perhaps I should move on to youth participation. I wonder what thoughts you have on how Government can more effectively engage with young people to influence its policy making. What more can we do to make youth participation and engagement effective and change policy as a result?

Ryan Bruce: I think things like this are a fantastic way of bringing young people into politics. Invite them to things like Select Committees to hear their views, because then they will feel they are being listened to and that MPs do care. I do not always think it is helpful to think young people have completely different opinions from everyone else. By and large, most young people's biggest concern is the economy just now. They do care about the NHS. I think things like this, things like the placement I am on, the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme, the House of Commons Apprenticeship Scheme, but

also even political parties just going out and knocking on doors—if you can get them engaged in a way that they have not been before, and show them that it is not just a bunch of middle-aged, white men making the decisions, then they will start to care more.

Calin Epure: I think things like this are important, but as well—and it goes slightly back into education, but not quite—allowing teachers to tell their students, “Look, you could do this. You can have this voluntary work.” Inviting young people on a Select Committee, it would be a certain part of the larger number of people. I live in North London and something quite strange happened a few weeks ago where I saw an event that was close to being actual gang war. I thought, “This is quite strange.” I think this would be an important group of society to target, the young people who drop out and the young people who feel that life is not fair to them. Give them the opportunity to do voluntary work and target them directly.

Q211 Simon Wright: Do you have any thoughts on the effectiveness of Government Departments in talking to each other about how their policy development may affect young people? As a Committee we look at a whole range of Government Departments. When you look at sustainable development and environmental issues, there are lots of Government Departments, whether it is the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Energy and Climate Change or the Department for Transport, where, just as they have an impact on environmental policy in the broader sense, so their policies impact on young people as well. Do you get any sense of whether that is done or whether that is done effectively or supportively?

Calin Epure: I have not done much research, but I can tell you from what I see on a daily basis it does not seem so. I do not deny that maybe the infrastructure is there. The opportunities might be there, but I do get the feeling that young people find it hard to find these opportunities. Maybe this platform that offers them should be made more user-friendly.

Q212 Martin Caton: Following on from what Simon has just asked, thinking specifically about sustainable development, are you confident that the different Government Departments are co-operating to take us forward on sustainable development or is there failure to co-ordinate?

Jamie Agombar: I have a few examples of where I think Departments have not worked very well. I was lucky enough to go to Japan for UNESCO’s end of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development conference and there was not a UK delegation there. It is important, in terms of climate change and some of the stuff that DEFRA is doing, that there was a UK delegation there, but obviously—

Q213 Chair: Why do you think that was?

Jamie Agombar: We asked the question and I think they decided either it was not an organisational or a governmental priority, but I think there was also some debate about who would represent the UK, and the result was that nobody went. I think that is a real missed trip, because you had great leadership from the Japanese Government and you had all the other Governments there; people being inspired about this action and thinking about what they are going to do as part of the new Global Action Programme.

Another example is we have published a report called “Homes Fit for Study”, where we are linking the welfare issues of cold homes with energy efficiency. The new 2018 regulations mean you cannot let out a badly inefficient home. There are certain exclusions for homes in multiple occupation. As far as we understand, the Department for Communities and Local Government will not change that loophole, which means that a lot of the homes that students rent will still be very energy inefficient after 2018. My understanding is that DECC want that to change and that is not happening.

There are quite a lot of examples, if you look around, about how Government works in silos. One thing that I have heard a few NGOs talk about is whether there is an opportunity to create, a bit like the Office for Budget Responsibility, an Office for Environmental Responsibility that has an impartial view

Chair: We have put that recommendation in our report.

Jamie Agombar: Yes. So I think there is some merit in that, just to bring people together and to overview how the interactions happen.

Q214 Martin Caton: Assuming that we can overcome the co-ordination failures, what more should the Government be doing to promote sustainable development?

Ryan Bruce: I think Britain could take a leading role on this, because I think if countries like Britain—for want of a better phrase the “bigger” countries—can take a leading role on this kind of thing then the rest will follow. I do worry that Britain is fantastic at promoting these kinds of things abroad but not as good at doing it domestically. We do have a kind of attitude of, “Do as we say, not as we do”. We have to start working on programs locally and at a local or regional level to get sustainable projects off the ground and perhaps giving incentives for that sort of thing. Again, it comes back to what you were saying about work experience and things. A lot of kids might not particularly want to do a sustainable thing, but if you turn around and say to them, “This would be great on your CV,” then we can promote programs like that. I have not heard of many programs for sustainability.

Calin Epure: Like you said, this can become a market. Bringing on renewable sources of energy creates jobs. Of course, the Government has to tackle the issue very carefully, not to challenge fossil fuels. Also, a different point that Britain can lead, and I think it does and it should continue, is research in the area of climate change. We are talking here of a nation that has Oxford and Cambridge and many other educational institutions that are top. By encouraging research then you create a pool of ideas from which not only can the UK take and put them into practice without waiting on the world to act, it can take unilateral action and say, “Okay, let’s try this. Let’s try wind farms in Scotland. Let’s see how that works.” Also then, with this pool of ideas, other nations can take from them and apply them, because this is a global issue.

Q215 Zac Goldsmith: I am going to step back, if you do not mind, and go back to something that I do not think we nailed at the beginning. We are a committee that is united by a concern for the broader environmental agenda. That is why we are on this Committee. We do not just want young people to flex their political muscles; we need you to, because that is what resonates in Parliament, that is what resonates with Governments. You put your finger on it. You gave us some data earlier about how much interest young people have in the

environment. You have just told us how few young people engage in elections and vote. The effect is that collectively we are not hearing that demand from young people. If we did hear that demand, politics would respond to it, just as it has done to the elderly component of society.

I want to try to understand. What needs to be done to overcome this sense that young people have that there is no point voting because nothing ever changes? It is a self-fulfilling prophecy and it is such a demoralising concept, but it is so prevalent. It is so dominant today. What needs to happen to make young people realise that that is not true, that if they were to flex their muscles politically things would change? It is a consequence of democracy. What is the biggest barrier that we need to overcome?

Ryan Bruce: I think it is perception. People have a perception that this place has been closed off from them. I think the “Inside the Commons” documentary that was on just now has been a fantastic thing. A lot of people are talking about that, but one of the things that resonated during the Scottish referendum campaign was that social media was used by both sides massively to get their point across. It had its flaws: the problem with social media is anybody can say anything they like; it is not like putting it in a newspaper where someone can come back and say, “That is not true. That is libellous.” But I think if we can safely utilise social media, it is that sort of thing that will engage young people in politics. There are things now on Facebook and Twitter that will—

Q216 Zac Goldsmith: Sorry to interrupt. Because we have had this explosion in social media now, logically we could expect then a much higher turnout at the next election in May from young people, but I am not convinced that is going to happen. That does not seem to be what the polls are telling us.

Shay Miah: Young people do not trust politicians. It is the same thing: young people do not trust politicians, and neither do others trust politicians. We had Liberal Democrat—

Q217 Zac Goldsmith: I am going to interrupt you as well, just because I think there is an acceptance there. I am going to sound arrogant in a sense, but there is a basic understanding of what young people think about politicians. We get that all the time. I am doing an assembly tomorrow morning. I will be talking to sixth-formers straight afterwards. I am talking to four groups of young people tomorrow and I do this week in, week out. I have a reasonable idea of the dislike people have for politics, politicians, and the way we operate here. I think we know that, but that is even more reason for people to get involved in politics. If the world is perfect, why bother voting? If there is a problem, you vote to change things. My question to you is not: what do young people think of politicians? I know that, more or less. What needs to happen to persuade young people that they are wrong about the pointlessness and futility of voting? What do you need to do to persuade them that they are duty-bound, if they want to change the world, to go out and engage and vote? That is the question.

Calin Epure: The next Government then should give something back to the young people. It can be on sustainability. It can be on education. It can be on welfare. It does not matter. Young people need to see something given back to them, especially after the last election when the Lib Dems promised no tuition fees and that did not happen. I think “An Idiot’s

Guide to Politics” by the BBC nailed the issue because it showed that a lot of young people feel we were told, “It is changing”. We were told that politicians will keep their promise. We were told no tuition fees, and that did not happen. I think it is critical that the next Government, regardless of the Government, gives something back to the youth so then the youth see, “Look, they are tackling us, so we should get involved.”

Ryan Bruce: I tend to disagree with that. I do not think programs like “An Idiot’s Guide to Politics”, and “The Revolution Will Be Televised” and things help at all. I think they do paint politicians as bumbling idiots that do not care. Since working here in October, and I am not trying to be flattering here at all, the work that MPs do is incredible.

Chair: We all know that.

Ryan Bruce: Exactly, but I think that is what needs to be put across.

Q218 Chair: But who has the interest in putting that across?

Ryan Bruce: I think there is going to be a carrot and stick approach, to be honest. I think you are right, young people do need something back, but I think this next election is going to send a shock wave through young people in that, “Actually, I could have used my vote and I could have prevented this.” I think there is going to be a stalemate at the next election, and it is going to be awful for everybody, including young people. I think that might be the kick up the backside that young people need to say, “Well, actually, my vote does count. I could have changed this and I did not,” but I genuinely do not think programs like “The Revolution Will Be Televised” and “An Idiot’s Guide to Politics” help at all.

Jamie Agombar: I think what we need is some leadership. We saw before the last election David Cameron out with his huskies and all this sort of stuff and it seemed that politicians were getting this. They were going to champion it. Then after the election we did not really see a lot and, in fairness, we have not seen much until the statement a few weeks ago that they are back interested in it, which, cynically, is because the election is coming.

I agree; it is a trust issue, but from a young person’s perspective we just need some leadership. We just need some people who are going to champion this. We mentioned the stats earlier. We know young people want to vote for parties that take sustainability seriously. They are worried about climate change. It is their future. They have to pick up the problems if it is not addressed soon.

The other point is around business lobbies as well. I think there is some scepticism not just about politicians not keeping to their word but that politicians have undue influence from fossil fuel industries and the like. I think people feel that is quite unfair and they are worried about that. I do not think they think it is a level playing field. In terms of their voice not being heard, their vote not counting—

Q219 Zac Goldsmith: I am sorry. My question probably sounded very frustrated, but I know that if 100% of young people voted, as opposed to whatever the figure is today, climate change and the environment would be way up the political agenda. It works both ways. The frustration that young people feel, I feel very strongly, because I know our job as a Committee would be so much easier if young people engaged.

Ryan Bruce: That is absolutely right. I think there has to be this meet in the middle. I do feel that young people—and I include myself in that, my friends, my generation—do think everything should come to them, the politicians should come to them and give them everything, but there has to be this meet in the middle. Like I said before, who is fooling who? There are people in Syria right now who are younger than me, teens who are picking up rifles for the right that we get at 18 years old. It is just given to us. I do not think making voting mandatory would help at all.

Zac Goldsmith: I totally agree.

Ryan Bruce: I just think that it is something that is so valuable. I have always voted. It is not even just about voting. Like you said, I think it is about engaging in politics at any level you can. It does not have to be about voting. You can go to the ballot paper and cross it off if you do not want to vote for any of them.

Calin Epure: I need to make this point again, and I am sorry for this, but I will make a reference to Romania. When people feel they can change something they will vote. In my case, I voted in the Romanian elections from here in London and that meant spending ten hours in a queue, but I knew that my vote and the vote of all of those people in that queue could influence that election. It is that feeling that we need to give back to the youth.

My Life, My Say, as part of the #BeTheChange campaign is doing a manifesto report that is going to be different. We are collecting ideas from young people, asking what would they do, what would they want to see in the next Government, and making a report. Then we want to hand that to the next Government. Now, it is critical that we can go back to the people we have asked for these ideas and say, “Look, we have given them the report and look what they have done. They have listened to this, they have listened to this,” so we see the change. Then those people will feel engaged and become more engaged, but can you imagine how frustrating it would be if we give the report and then nothing changes and nothing on that report gets tackled? All of the people that worked with it, all of the people that sent their ideas, will just go, “What was the point?” That is the issue that needs to be tackled. If it is tackled, we need a lot of transparency so we can see it is tackled.

Jamie Agombar: We are a strong supporter of votes at 16 as well. I think the earlier you get people voting the more likely they are to participate. It would be quite an empowering thing, we think.

Zac Goldsmith: I was opposed to that and I was challenged by a group of students aged 15 and 16. They came to my office and I was defenceless. I did not have a single argument to take them on. There and then I did a U-turn on the issue, simply because my arguments were not standing up. I have to apologise, no disrespect to you, but I have to go, I am afraid. I have another meeting. Sorry, chair.

Chair: We are always in three places at one and the same time because, as Ryan says, we are so busy.

Q220 Mrs Spelman: I know none of you are from the British Youth Council, so you cannot answer for them, but in our briefing pack we have evidence from the British Youth Council that is very critical of the engagement of the Government in preparation before and during the Rio+20 Conference. Having been Secretary of State at the time, I know there was quite a

significant delegation of young people in Rio; not necessarily from the British Youth Council, this is true, but one of the problems is there may be a proliferation of different youth organisations.

Do you think that, to get better participation in international summitry, there could be a way of building an alliance of youth organisations so the negotiator could clearly hear your voice? Do you think there is a way? The Girl Guides, for example, organised a parallel conference in Rio and funded the Guides to go out to Rio. We certainly invited them to all our briefings and discussions and on to the stands with the business people at exactly the same time. They had equal access. It can be done, but is it maybe to do with the fact that there are lots of different organisations involved in this? I do not know if perhaps the NUS has a view.

Jamie Agombar: Yes, we do have something on that. I mentioned earlier that we survey students regularly and over the last four years, with the Higher Education Academy, we have surveyed about 30,000 students. Consistently, 60% of them want to learn about sustainable development—this is first-year students—and 80% to 85% want their institution to embed it. We were kind of frustrated, because although that helped lever this £5 million from HEFCE for the Students’ Green Fund, that that is just a UK story; it is just about our 2.3 million students in higher education, but globally there are 135 million or so students in HE. Other organisations such as ours, the NUS in France or the NUS in Canada, do survey but they use different questions. There is no parity, so we cannot actually say, “Young people or students want this.”

As a result, we are forming an organisation called SOS, which is Students Organising for Sustainability. It is not going to be an organisation. It is going to be an informal alliance. We will not need funding and we will not need policy and things, but it is just a way of getting us to talk with other NUSes and other student-led groups so that we can collaborate on research, campaigns and communications. The view is that we can then go to the EU or the UN and let them know what we think of the SDGs, for example, or let them know what the students want. Hopefully it will become quite a powerful voice.

Mrs Spelman: That is good.

Jamie Agombar: We have progressed quite rapidly with that. We have contacted about 70 organisations across all the different continents and we hope to launch it in partnership with the Eden Project in October.

Mrs Spelman: That is very good to hear.

Q221 Chair: If I may cut in on that, could you elaborate on the funding for that?

Jamie Agombar: Yes, we do not have any funding for it, but we did approach—

Chair: It is quite important.

Jamie Agombar: It is quite important. We approached DfID, because we linked into the SDGs, and we had some initial discussions there. It comes back to my point that it is all very good having the SDGs but unless you link it into education, unless you engage young people in the development and the delivery of it—and coming back to my point around critical challenge and engagement as well—then they are fairly meaningless to young people. They will just become something that, at best, they know about and learn about

but are not engaged in or involved in. We hope SOS will become a dynamic way of us talking more, both within the UK, we already talk as organisations in many instances, but internationally.

Mrs Spelman: The timing of the creation of the alliance could not be better, because it is just on the eve of the Paris talks. Certainly the approach the Government took to Rio+20 was to build a multi-stakeholder group before we went to Rio, with NGOs, businesses, youth groups and anyone we thought had a locus on the subject, and to prepare what our line should be. I would imagine that DECC will be doing the same thing in preparation for Paris. If it is not, you could suggest it because it is a method that is quite effective for operating as a country in an international environment. Your timing of your alliance could not be better.

Chair: I think that is where the role of this Committee comes in because we see what is happening with DfID, DECC and DEFRA but, going back to what was initially said at the outset about young people not having any sense of being able to be listened to or making a difference, so why vote, this is part of the process of how the sustainable development goals will go forward. If there is no funding for that part of the process—and I know, because personally I was aware of the discussions that were going on with DfID—then I think it is something that this Committee needs to look at as much as you are looking at it as well because, no disrespect to anybody here, a recommendation from the Select Committee backing up what should happen is just as important.

Q222 Mrs Spelman: I think you have got copies of the 17 proposed goals at the moment and it would be interesting to hear from you what you think the Government could do to engage people at this stage of the process. They have not been agreed upon. The Secretary General said at the end of last year, “We are at a historic crossroads, and the direction we take will determine whether we will succeed or fail in fulfilling our promises”, which will, in turn, impact your generation even more than mine. What more could we be doing at this stage of the process to make sure your voice is heard, and do you have views about the 17?

Ryan Bruce: For a start this is the first time I had heard of the 17, so I do not think they have been well publicised. Perhaps they have been in dusty tomes somewhere, which is fair enough, but I think it all comes back to getting information out there. Having read the 17 goals, there is not one of them I disagree with. I think they are all fantastic aims, and then there is 169 other points that come from that.

Mrs Spelman: Yes, finer points.

Ryan Bruce: But I think it comes back to getting the information out there and, again, it comes back to engaging with politics. If environment sustainability is the kind of thing you are interested in, this should be the kind of thing that is out there for you to be able to see and, again, contact your MP or contact the Secretary of State and ask about it.

Q223 Mrs Spelman: There are two ways you can do this, directly and indirectly. You do it indirectly through your elected representative, which is why you need to be in franchise and why you need to vote. That is the person who is going to make the decision at the table. One of the interesting questions in the briefing note is, “Why can’t there be a youth member of the negotiating team?” and the Girl Guides asked me that question in Rio. One of the difficulties in international summitry is you have one politician whose job it is to negotiate and one

senior civil servant. That is quite difficult, but I do not think that precludes other models of having young people in the wider team. That is something I think you could be pressing for.

Ryan Bruce: Absolutely, yes, but I do think as well that when you make a point of saying, “We need to have a young person on this,” it kind of makes them feel that they are just there for the sake of being there.

Mrs Spelman: Yes, that is not desirable.

Ryan Bruce: Whereas if you just invited someone to be a part of the panel or to be a part of your team that is at that summit, instead of saying, “You are here to represent youth,” just say, “You are here because we want your views”. I do think sometimes people think if they are invited as the youth representative, then their views are going to be carefully listened to and then ignored later on. It is just about including them at the same level as you would include everybody else.

Mrs Spelman: Yes. The same thing happens by the way for women.

Ryan Bruce: Absolutely, yes.

Mrs Spelman: You are often invited to be the token woman and it is very irritating.

Ryan Bruce: Yes, exactly.

Mrs Spelman: It is the same issue. Sorry, I cut across Jamie.

Jamie Agombar: I was just going to say, we have not formally been consulted on them as well, as the UK’s largest youth-led organisation, but we have informally looked at them and I know we have fed into this Committee before on that. It is exactly the sort of thing we would like Students Organising for Sustainability to be able to do, to look at this and to critically challenge it and publicise what we like about it and what we do not like about it, almost as a twin track process to the formal process. Do young people of the world think that this is enough? It is all very good us giving you all comments here in the UK, but a young person in Nigeria or a young person in Brazil will have very different viewpoints on this sort of stuff. You would hope that the people who are consulting on it have done a better job in those countries than they have done here, and you would hope that the NUS equivalent or the organisation equivalent would also be consulted. I am unclear as to what the formal process was and how they decided who to reach out to.

Q224 Mrs Spelman: We have to cast our minds back a bit, but there was a very pessimistic view that anything would be achieved at Rio at all. That was coming off an incredibly low base and when the stakeholder group was brought together, NGOs, businesses, different societal groups—we brought them together in the City—that pessimism tended to pervade the room, but from Colombia emerged the best idea, which was the Sustainable Development Goals. Nobody else had a better idea for a good outcome from the summit.

As this multi-stakeholder group, we made that decision to throw our weight, as the United Kingdom, behind the SDGs. However, another illustration for you of what youth participation in summitry can achieve is that some of the businesses in this country that take sustainability to their heart were pushing for corporate accounting for sustainability and for that to be one of the main things for the UK to push for. It is not done anywhere in the world.

It would be a first and the UK managed to get that into the agreement. That is an illustration for you of how, if you can get young people's participation in a stakeholder engagement before a summit, before the die is cast and what will be achieved, then you can help to shape the outcome.

I have to say that most of the media had prewritten, "Nothing will be achieved at Rio+20," but the SDGs are a significant outcome, emanating from a comparatively small Latin American country, that eventually 193 countries decided to back the best idea. That was the background to it.

Chair: The issue there is the process. I know from meetings that there were with Columbia they put a huge amount of effort into preparing what they wanted to take to that conference table at that summit. I suppose we are looking to see how we can get more young people involved in the process at whatever stage or level but for it to be from the very beginning to the delivery of the agreement and then, post that, the delivery of it, which goes back to the point about involvement in decision making.

Calin Epure: A very good way, and it would be a bit easier for the Government, is that it creates a committee of all people and then this board has to get the views of young people and then the board can work with different organisations and then the organisations themselves go by and get the opinions of young people. So you have layers and layers. You get the ideas as the first layer and, through the organisations, the organisations sum up the best ideas and then this keeps going through and through and so you come up with the best from a large group of people.

Jamie Agombar: I suppose it is a comment or a question, though I know you are supposed to ask us. Going back, the departments that are involved in the SDGs, presumably it is DfID that leads on it but I would be interested to know how the Department for Education and BIS in terms of its college and university brief are mobilising on this because they have incredible opportunities to use students, lecturers and academics to input to this. If it is just sat in DfID and not being shared around, it seems like a missed trick.

Q225 Mrs Spelman: It is not that bad. We did do an inquiry and we had the Secretary of State for the Department of International Development here. They are the lead department on this but we were given reassurances in two regards: first, that at the Secretary of State level, with other relevant departments, they are kept in the loop on the development of these goals; but, just as important, we also got a reassurance that at a European level, because the EU negotiates as a block, the UK Secretary of State was actively engaged with her comparative Ministers in other European countries to try to make sure we get, again, the outcome that we, as a country, would like to see in terms of the 17 goals. Those were the two things we—

Chair: It is kept under review and scrutinised, I think.

Mrs Spelman: Absolutely.

Shay Miah: We could involve more young people to be involved in a sustainable environment. Why don't we have a group, a committee that we create ourselves and have a young person's view by getting one person from each region, by using the NUS, the Youth Parliament, finding young people from these groups to be part of a committee that feeds back with the agenda the Committee has and work with that?

Q226 Mrs Spelman: You are a representative of the Youth Parliament, so that is presumably what it is for. In fact I was going to ask you because in your manifesto as a Youth Parliament, it is interesting—I was going to just ask you about this because I am interested—under “Environment” you have mentioned renewable energy. We touched on that but it says here, “Environment. A greener future for Britain, including the national co-ordination of recycling.” This is an interesting subject. What form do you think that should take?

Shay Miah: With the recycling bit, it is, for example, that when we go to parks we don’t see better recycling bins. Do you know that is? There should be bins for plastic, cardboard and glass, but there are not any in parks. Why don’t we promote that kind of attitude within schools? Schools now have the local authority recycling bins that they promote to young people. The perception among young people of recycling is changing. They don’t like dropping litter on the floor and they want to recycle it. It is changing. We are just working with that in society, so that if people don’t put something in the right bin, it feels awkward for them. That is why we are promoting some new recycling ways, putting the three types of bins into parks, schools and places around. I think that will work. The only reason why local authorities can’t do that is because of the cuts enveloping the budget that the Environmental Department has. It is expensive—to buy the three bins and to scatter hundreds of them around is expensive.

Mrs Spelman: They are funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government to do that.

Shay Miah: Yes.

Q227 Mrs Spelman: I wondered whether your national co-ordination point was that Hartlepool does it one way and Sunderland does it another way. I wondered whether you were driving at a bit more uniformity.

Shay Miah: I don’t think environmental points get driven as much as they should be. Yes, it is in our manifesto but it is not getting driven to meet an agenda. It is an agenda that the Youth Parliament believes in it but the young people themselves don’t think environment is as important as other issues, so other issues get prioritised over the environment.

Jamie Agombar: Just on this, there is a massive problem of inconsistency. Recycling bins are disappearing because of materials recycling facilities, and the problem is the communication is not there. Students and young people think the recycling bins have gone. We did a project with DEFRA as part of your Reward and Recognition Fund. We managed to run a project based on our energy efficiency dormitory competition but, on recycling, we managed to increase recycling rates. We found that a big barrier with students, a key moment of change, was not knowing how to recycle or what to recycle because of the inconsistency, so different at home, different at college and different at the university. I don’t think that helps us.

Q228 Neil Carmichael: I just want to ask a couple of questions about the European Union. I have only just arrived, so you may have covered this already in some detail. I am just thinking about the interface that you all have with European Union decision-making processes because, of course, it has a big remit in the environmental area. I would like a comment on that.

Jamie Agombar: We are not engaged in that formally, although we have informal discussions with the odd European Parliament MP.

Q229 Neil Carmichael: Yes. That would be a useful interface, especially the emerging things like, for example, the European Union's thoughts on having a Europe-wide energy policy because that is directly connected to the issues you have been covering and certainly relevant to the question of protecting the environment in terms of promoting more renewables? What kind of interface or contribution to the debate would you like to have around that subject?

Jamie Agombar: Before you came in I mentioned that NUS, the organisation I am from, was setting up an informal alliance of student organisations so that we can work with other student-led organisations in other countries in Europe and beyond to find out what students want, what young people want, so that we can get a bigger picture than just what UK students want, which, hopefully, will allow us to get more of a representative voice working with organisations like the European Students' Union at the EU level.

Calin Epure: With the EU it is better to have a let's-work-together approach than what you see with all the nations in the EU trying to fight each other a bit. That is a very important thing to work in the future, especially like it is at the moment within the UK; the EU is being used for electoral purposes: "We should leave." "We shouldn't leave." "Let's have a referendum. We were supposed to have a referendum," and so on. I feel that the truth about the European Union is not so easily out there for the general public. They are misinformed and disillusioned about the EU and they see it as this very negative force, when I believe it is not.

Q230 Dr Offord: This does touch upon some of your comments that you have all made but back on Valentine's Day the leaders of the three main parties here all committed to seeking a low-carbon economy after the next general election. I do not know if you saw that but, if you did, what do you think of that and do you think it goes far enough?

Ryan Bruce: It is one of the few issues where everyone can see there is consensus and that they are willing to work together. That is one of the few times where people go, "Great. I appreciate that. I respond to that." They are great words. It is a fantastic sentiment. Again, I just wonder whether anything will come of it. It signals that the three main parties understand sustainability and the environment is going to be the next massive issue in politics, but, again, whether anything major comes of it I don't know. It seems a bit like it has come just before an election.

Calin Epure: A very important point here to make, and it links to what you have said and also to the millennium goals, is that the way they are set out, for example, the first and the most important millennium goal—because I am more aware of this than the low-carbon emissions—was to end poverty in all its forms. It has been halved since 1990 to 2010 but there is a loophole because they have described poverty as earning less than \$1.25 a day. When they looked at this they said, "Yes, the number of people who earn less than \$1.25 since 1990 has halved by the time of 2010." However, the cost of living had increased". You can claim this to be a success, but how much of a success is it? When people take a closer look at this, again, they get that feeling of, "What is going on? Is it working or not?" That is a very important thing to consider regarding the low emissions goal. It looks brilliant that the parties are willing to collaborate but the question is that the next

Government needs to show that something is happening and it is not just an illusion, because people will be digging into this. They will be researching.

Jamie Agombar: It is great that the parties are working together on it. It is a bit late in that not a lot has happened for the last four years—it's Valentine's Day and the run up to a general election and we have Paris coming up. I come back to my point earlier around if you want to engage young people there has got to be continual outstanding leadership from politicians on sustainability. We know that this is an issue that is important to young people because they see it is their future.

Just to pick up on one point I made earlier, around 60% of students want to learn about sustainability. That is what they say in the first year. When you unpack that, it is, first, because they are worried about the future but also they see it as an opportunity because they see a million unemployed young people and they think it will help them get a job, with all the green growth and green economy talk there is. The positivity is a side that we don't often see coming out and a critique of the environmental movement because it is very often negative and negative does not engage. It is nice when politicians come out and say something positive, even if it is quite late.

Shay Miah: I agree with what they have done by combining the three major parties to pledge on one thing that they all agree on, and that 60% of NUS first-years believe that they should be taught, showing that they are working together, as one team, as one people, to fight for the future of young people in environmental terms. We want to cut down as much as we can before you get to power and I totally agree with it, but we just want to see something out of it rather than just a pledge.

Q231 Dr Offord: Jamie mentioned Paris coming up. After this commitment, this pledge made by the three leaders, where do you think it places the UK in terms of the leadership stakes, shall we say, as part of Paris negotiations? Does it place us at the forefront?

Jamie Agombar: Yes. All eyes are on the UK because of the Climate Change Act and our historic leadership on the issues. With Copenhagen a lot of people got their hopes up high and everyone said, "If it does not happen now we're doomed," and then it didn't happen. Certainly from the student activists I talked to, they are playing down Paris because they were bitten last time round and they are not overly optimistic. It needs to happen. There needs to be a good agreement to come out from it.

I was meeting with people in Parliament just this morning and they were talking about their concerns about the coal industry and the fossil industry and the power of the lobby. It is still a concern with activists that, no matter how willing politicians are, ultimately they will be steered by business gain or by political interest or short-term thinking over the long-term brave decisions that need to be made. Young people will support a politician to make a long-term difficult decision on sustainability or climate change. They will have their full backing and, in fact, I think it will engage and impassion and embolden students to do more and to go out and vote more. I don't think politicians need to be worried about this in terms of their electoral successes.

Q232 Dr Whitehead: Can I just pursue this joint agreement to work together on climate change goals? By the way, the actual agreement includes working together to sort carbon budgets out, the five-year budgets that go forward from 2050, and also to phase coal out as a

main fuel, a particularly polluting fuel obviously, in the energy economy. However, all that is almost a series of goals whereby the attainment of the goal is if nothing changes, as opposed to bad changes resulting from not doing anything about it. What we have talked about this afternoon is particularly the question of young people being unseen if something happens as a result of their engagement.

How might one ally that long-term and, I think, absolutely essential goal and essentially say to people, “Right, we have to do this and we have to stick at it over a very long period of time,” and then the results will be perhaps more or less what we hope they will be at a point where all the young people who are involved in it will not be young people anymore? How do we make that difference in terms of allying that long-term joint endeavour with significant milestones and wins that can secure that engagement?

Jamie Agombar: Just from our perspective, we are seeing the work that we are doing as a long-term social project. By embedding sustainability in the formal and informal curriculum and things like the Students’ Green Fund, we are trying to make sure that when young people and students leave tertiary education they turn out, as I mentioned, as part of the solution to these problems. They might not be the next Prime Minister for another 10 or 15 years but some of the students going through education now that are involved in our programmes, that have had a decent education and that get this issue in a critical thinking, global citizenship perspective, will go on to positions of authority: running businesses, running education, running Government.

The issue comes with the short-term leadership because, arguably, tertiary education and the education system have failed us because a lot of the current political leaders, business leaders and educational leaders do not quite get it in the way that they need to. There is a short-term gap where we need politicians to step up and take the leadership that is required. The hope is that, ultimately, through education and the work that organisations like ours do, we will be able to ensure that future leaders get this agenda and are willing to take the political leadership that is required.

Shay Miah: Jamie was talking about leadership and the short term that a Government has. The Government only has five-year terms in Parliament unless they get re-elected. With that pledge they have made with all three political parties, if they work together as they have pledged, surely the leadership could be the same. Having the same leadership means a long-term plan and everything would go smoothly, because nothing would change because the political party has changed. Everything will be as they have planned a few years ago, so that the long term comes in.

Calin Epure: On your point about by the time this reaches its deadline the people who are now young people will no longer be young people, climate change is something that, if you get involved in it, it doesn’t go away because it is always there and especially as it is going to be very hard to get rid of it and revert climate change. A lot of research is still being done on it and so far there are no ideas on how that could possibly be done. It would be better because if you get the young people involved now, when they get to 30 they will try to get their young people involved and it will continue and it will become a natural process. This natural process of politics outside politics will also have spillage into politics with more young people wanting to become part of the traditional political system.

Ryan Bruce: I also think that it is not just about those goals you are talking about. In a lot of the reports I read about this, people were saying that this issue could be as dangerous to our national security and economic resilience as terrorism. Yes, you might not have a massive win with it but, at the same time, you don't want a massive loss with it either. Young people will respond to it. If you do keep those goals, fair enough. Yes, it is not a glamorous massive win but it is also about not making the levels go above that. If you keep it there, you have won. Young people do want to take a lead in it because, as you say, young people are the people that this is going to get passed on to and then when we're not young people any more we will pass it on to the next generation. It is a cyclical thing and it is not just about those goals. It is about other things: the economy and security.

Q233 Dr Whitehead: Some of what I am driving at is what we mentioned very much earlier in the discussions. The question is either, "I cannot see the point and this does not involve me," or, "This is so enormous, what can I do about it? I will get on with going out for the evening."

Ryan Bruce: One of the good things about environmental issues and sustainability is that most young people do think, "This is about me. It does involve me." If you look at Treasury Committees and other things, they think, "That has nothing to do with me. Business committees, that has nothing to do with me." Young people do, by and large, think green issues and sustainability issues are to do with them because it has got to a stage now where it has to be, otherwise what is the alternative? We just keep going down the road we're going down now.

Calin Epure: However, in a sense, this happened naturally because we are starting to see the effects of climate change and so young people are waking up on their own. What would be very important to see is actual campaigns and posters and trying to get the young people involved because then they will be bombarded with the information. They think, "Okay, this is an issue. I am part of it. I should do something."

Dr Whitehead: Alternatively, if you do nothing you have made the decision already.

Q234 Chair: Sometimes people take action for the sake of taking action, rather than from the point of view that that action is important. We reach the stage when the understanding about climate change and what is needed becomes something that is just so all-embracing and so pertinent that it cannot be ignored. It is how you get that understanding before you reach that stage.

Calin Epure: It is quite hard because, to be honest, young people right now are concerned about their future lives and, as you said with the NUS study, housing and employability are the first two things. Obviously, as a young person, you are thinking, "Okay, what am I doing with my life?" You want to go into university but university costs £9,000 a year, so you have to take that into consideration. If you cannot afford it then you need loans. If you need loans then you will need a job afterwards. It is all this pressure on young people to get a job. That is why they don't have the luxury that other generations had.

I discuss this with my lecturers all the time. Twenty years ago, which is not that much time, young people would be very radical in their political views. Today they are not so much and you have seen that in an increase of conservative values among youth. That is because they don't want to think about radical things. They want to think, "Okay, how do I

get a job? What do I do with my life?” The better we tackle this financial aspect or we make climate change part of this financial aspect, so jobs in the region, the more young people will look towards it.

Shay Miah: Yes, there should be more jobs. We know there are more jobs within sustainability and environment. There are jobs there, such as the nuclear power station or going to the steel factories. There are jobs there for young people. In Hartlepool, we have a nuclear power station. It generates £33 million a year and it has over 10,000 employees. However, the expiry date of the nuclear power station is 2024, which means that 10,000 people will lose their jobs unless we build another nuclear power station that is cost-efficient and eco-friendly, which we plan somewhere and then give back to communities, generate the money it needs and then nothing will work out with that, with the young people being more involved with the environment.

Jamie Agombar: Just to reinforce the message of hope, 60% of young people want to learn about sustainability but we also asked a separate question in that NUS-HEA survey and consistently, over the last four years, the majority of young people were willing to sacrifice £3,000 from their starting salary—this is before the £9,000 hike and subsequently after—to work for a company either in an ethical environmental role or a company that takes seriously ethical environmental issues. Even though they are graduating with £60,000 worth of debt, they are still willing to sacrifice the money because they believe this is important to them.

Q235 Mrs Spelman: That came up very strongly at the launch of a sustainability report here last night. The businesses that contributed to it said that your generation of employees are pushing business hard on its sustainability credentials and the ethics of the business. When being interviewed, they are asking, “Are you paying your taxes?” People are radical but in a different way. Probably the mythical radicalisation goes back to about 1968, which was even before my time.

Chair: It was not before mine.

Mrs Spelman: That is when the students took to the street in Paris and elsewhere. Each successive generation has its key issues. For my generation it was the Cold War. For your generation it is climate change. Big issues that we have to engage with that can, as Alan said, be off-putting. “What little bit can I do, if you are faced with all that?” Of course, the answer is everybody can live individually in a more sustainable way and that builds up. The big decisions like whether or not to renew the power stations cross more than one generation and Shay is absolutely right about that. A decision that our generation of politicians has made to renew the nuclear power capacity in this country is something that will impact heavily on your own generation in terms of the energy mix.

Jamie Agombar: Just one final point, as well, in terms of getting students along a progression pathway to more activism. We do an awful lot engaging students through our programmes. We have fantastic reach and lots of success in getting them to do bits of a programme, but we are conscious that we don’t necessarily ask them to critically think about some of the bigger challenges.

For the first time ever we are holding a National Students’ Sustainability Summit this March at Leeds on 23 March, and any of you are welcome to come along if you want, for

200 students who have worked with us to challenge them to think about creating workshops on some of the bigger issues. Paris and COP is one. We have some French students coming over for that. It will be about behaviour change, institutional change and curriculum, all the way through to food issues, population as well and how population links into the climate change debate. We have a couple of amazing keynote speakers. It might be nice if one of the Committee could come along.

Mrs Spelman: 23 March?

Jamie Agombar: In Leeds. You would be most welcome, as would any of you three as well.

Chair: I have just one eye on the clock now because we are about to move to a vote in the House of Commons. We have almost perhaps come full circle and the latter comments relate to a report this Committee did on well-being and looking at GDP. It is not just about GDP. It is about well-being and how one measures that quality of life as well and how the environment fits into that. We have covered a lot of ground. We certainly wanted to take the views of your generation in terms of how our report is taken further. Can I thank each of you for taking the trouble of appearing before the Committee today? Thank you very much indeed.