REPORT

The initial brief at Wellington College inspired us with a multitude of possible project ideas that would be suitable for our locality. After brainstorming several options, we decided that we would need a slightly larger group in order to be able to accomplish our main initiatives. Subsequently, three new members were recruited for qualities, including enthusiasm, commitment and useful skill sets, such as a proficiency in technology.

Following considerable debate, we chose life below water (no. 14) as our principal goal and we also decided that we would incorporate responsible consumption and production (no. 12), climate action (no. 13) and life on land (no. 15) as our secondary goals. With all of this in mind we began with our first project…

Project 1:

Our first idea was to redesign and renovate our school's classroom recycling scheme. We were shocked to discover that the majority of the recycling bin contents were actually disposed into the collective general waste bin by the cleaners, despite facilities in place for paper and card recycling. We wanted to create a long-term system, where students could empty the classroom recycling bins at regular intervals throughout the week. At first, we struggled to recruit this 'team' of willing pupils, nevertheless after some deliberation and multiple discussions with various members of staff, we asked each of the Year 7 and 8 tutors to nominate two or three names. They would become an 'Eco-Rep'. In total there are 46 active Eco-Reps.

Next, the logistics of such a scheme had to be clarified. When we carried out a school-wide survey on whether a room needed a recycling bin (including offices, specialised rooms, and regions near a public printer), we realised just under 40 were missing the classic red bin. Thankfully, a member of the senior leadership team offered to order new bins, and help to co-ordinate with the cleaners.

This led us to when and where each of the students would operate. We decided that the Eco-Reps of each tutor would stay together in proximity to their tutor room, and simplified route maps will dictate which bins they would empty. The next stage of the project was to gather the Eco-Reps together for a meeting and explain what they needed to do. The presentation described their duties; the identification of a contaminated bin (and why that is important to avoid); the location of the correct outside bin; and who to seek to answer questions. Year 7s took the Tuesday bins, whilst the Year 8s emptied the Thursday bins, ensuring that each recycling bin got emptied twice a week without fail.

During the early weeks, we encountered some problems: firstly, there were some complaints from teachers claiming that their bins were going missing. We tackled this by confirming the Eco Reps' respective routes. Also, by adding instructions that they only take the initial bin (their tutors'), and tip the rest into that one bin, therefore mitigating any losses. Other minor issues raised were locked classrooms, especially the science and design technology corridors, understandably because of child safety policies. This was resolved by a compromise with those departments.

The final problem we encountered was the inconsistency of recycling bin contents. Some were too full, as though they had not been emptied at all, and conversely some of the bins were always empty. Furthermore, the outside council recycling bin, where all the recycling was deposited, was now (ironically) overflowing. In response to this we agreed that we (the Eco Leaders) would patrol the corridors during the bin collection days to make sure everything runs smoothly, and we asked Mr Smallman to request another recycling bin from the council, who happily obliged.

After roughly a month of us patrolling the corridors and the other issues being resolved, we decided to award the Eco Reps with a badge for their commitment and the chance to design a logo for our recycling bins. Hopefully, this scheme is set to continue, with the upcoming Year 10s assuming the roles of Eco Leaders, and organising the next school generation of Eco-Reps.

Project 2:

With the aim of establishing our project to the school, we introduced ourselves to the school via assembly presentations. They detailed why we are participating in this competition, and how important the sustainable development goals are in everyday life. Most importantly, we created a strong social media presence, so we can document and share our progress as a school. We decided that we would make an Instagram account (@bps_ecoteam), most of the students at our school are on Instagram, and it enables them to be informed of upcoming events and see photos of the progress we have made as a group. We regularly upload to this account and reply to any comments and messages we receive.

Project 3:

Through research into other recycling schemes that operated in our region, we found one that enabled us to recycle crisp packets, biscuit packets, pens and tooth brushes, and pays a small amount of money per kilogram, which could be re-invested into our project. To begin with, we had already asked the kitchen staff to collect any boxes that they had from food packaging from the start of our original project. This resulted in the creation of a competition between tutor groups, with the incentive of a mystery prize for the greatest weights of each type of recyclable waste. Every term, the crisp/biscuit packets and pens will be counted, weighed and sent off, and the top tutor group per year group will be officially congratulated and claim the prize. The boxes were swiftly distributed and the contest for the most rubbish commenced!

We then realised that Hampshire County Council accept plastic bottles as part of their recycling programme. We replaced the labels on the red recycling bins with a sign saying "Paper, cardboard and plastic bottles" and below it was the new logo from the winner of the competition. In addition, we collected data to prove how we have made an impact- a small water bottle survey before and after the new scheme, on how many students bought single-use bottles. In each room there are new and improved bins for the new recycling scheme.

So, with the new recycling and with all the 1800 students and over 250 members of staff involved, it was time for the planning of our major project.

Project 4:

Our last project had been on the table from day one, starting out as potentially being a river clean-up. A week later it morphed into a beach litter pick at Western Shore. Eventually after plenty of research and conversations, we concluded organising our own beach litter pick would be impossible within the time period and with reference to resources. After a few more weeks of looking around on the internet, we stumbled upon a beach clean-up held at a local nature reserve. We immediately emailed the council who run the clean-up, asking whether they would like a group of volunteers to help. They responded affirmative, so we sent a letter to our 46 Eco-Reps and had roughly twenty reply slips back.

The beach clean-up was held at Chessel Bay Nature Reserve and in total 96 volunteers attended, together collecting 4 tonnes of rubbish over a span of 4 hours. We collected a variety of different things ranging from polystyrene pontoons, all the way down to high density polymorph pellets scattered across the bay.

The main problem we encountered on this project was the lack of time we had to clean the beach. The beach is only accessible at low tide, therefore meaning that we had a very limited timeframe to complete the clean-up. We resolved this by collaborating alongside the council to organise another clean-up in October and officially adding it to the school's annual calendar so the future generations of the school can continue to participate in this local event.

Overall, we have thoroughly enjoyed the challenges and outcomes of taking part in the Global Social Leaders competition, but what we have enjoyed the most, is making difference to our community and the local environment and forward planning events on the school calendar in order to maintain what we have put in place.