

# Students 4 Global Action

You can bring students together for 'global action' conferences, and they join together in writing inspiring action plans, but what happens then?

NEAD (Norfolk Education & Action for Development) organised a programme of student conferences, with pre- and post- conference support to help their 'action plans for a better world' come to fruition.

## What did NEAD want to achieve?

NEAD has organised secondary school conferences for over 20 years but staff felt they had had little control (or knowledge) of what happened as a result of these conferences. For example, in 2004 a conference took place for Year 9 students from eight schools, which involved awareness raising activities in the morning and action planning in school groups in the afternoon. Although the conference was evaluated by students as a great success, after the conference it seemed that the students, in all but a few cases, were not supported by their accompanying teachers to further develop or carry out their action plans, leading Sandy Betlem, Schools Work Coordinator at NEAD to ask: '*Were they just tokenistic, fun days?*'.

So in 2005, NEAD obtained a 3-year grant from DFID to replicate these conferences, but with time built in to support the action plans after the conference. The goal was whole school change, stimulated by conference input, motivated by students (bottom up), supported by teachers, with extra support from external agencies including NEAD (as opposed to CPD/project support for teacher-led change).

## How did they set about doing this?

In the first two years of funding, NEAD have organised four Students 4 Global Action Conferences in Norfolk and Suffolk, involving over 470 students and teachers from 32 schools. Year 8 and 9 students (ages 12-14) were targeted because they will remain at their schools for long enough for their action plans to have an impact and they are not encumbered by GCSE workloads. Promotional letters were sent out to each secondary school in the county in which they were held, and a contract for schools enrolling was developed.

Agencies, groups and individuals were recruited to deliver interactive and motivational workshops at the conferences to stimulate appropriate action planning in the afternoon. The

workshops were preceded by a plenary activity to raise awareness of key global dimension issues and to enable participants to meet, talk and learn from each other. The How, How, How Activity (see NEAD website) was used to help the students draw up their Action Plans.

After the conferences, all the schools were contacted with offers of support. As a result, NEAD were invited to meetings with the student groups in some of the schools to discuss how they could put their action plans into effect. Other schools requested particular information, contacts or website addresses to support their action plans.

### How well did they achieve their aims?

The approach to publicising the conferences was successful, resulting in waiting lists. In the first year several schools cancelled at the last minute meaning that student fees didn't cover the conference costs. In the second year fees were required in advance and were non-refundable unless a month's notice was given.

In Year 1, finding out what had happened with the action plans after the conferences remained difficult. Offers of free support were not taken up, information was only obtained from seven of the 18 schools and much of this was sketchy. In Year 2 a pre-conference briefing was held at the venues to emphasise the importance of follow-up and this proved very effective, resulting in much better information from a higher proportion of the schools.

Post-conference activities included some excellent examples of active global citizenship. In Year 1 feedback was often based around ideas of raising money. In the second year NEAD encouraged teachers to support students in putting emphasis on personal responsibility and actions as an ideal, rather than throwing money at a cause. Fair trade groups were established in some schools; students led assemblies on racism and human rights; energy-saving initiatives and eco-policies were set up and some schools decided to work towards Eco School status; a school allotment was established to provide locally-grown food; and a 'Global Warrior' group was set up which, as well as introducing fair trade, facilitated an International Students' Group to explore cultural diversity within the school.

### What do they plan to do next?

This model of providing a pre-conference briefing and post-conference support and follow up has proved effective in encouraging teachers to support their students in developing and carrying out their action plans, and will be continued if funding allows.

*“The teachers who ran best with it were Citizenship teachers, because the active citizenship ticked their boxes.”*

Sandy Betlem, Schools Work Coordinator, NEAD

*“It opened my eyes to the world I live in...”*

Student evaluation response

*“Today I was surprised to learn that I knew very little!! The depth of my ignorance!”*

Teacher evaluation response

### Reflections:

- There is a global dimension to all curriculum subjects and all subject approaches are valuable in enabling young people to make sense of the world. However, citizenship education approaches can enhance all subjects with the recognition that teachers cannot have all the answers when it comes to global issues.
- The action learning cycle (learning – reflection – action) can encourage critical and creative thinking.
- Students are more likely to feel empowered and motivated when the work is student-led.

*“The most educational part of the day was the Refugees and Asylum Seekers workshop, it has changed my views completely...”*

Student evaluation response

*“As a result of today I will continue to encourage pupils to take an interest in and awareness of our place in the global community and focus more on our similarities rather than differences...”*

Teacher evaluation response

More information:

- NEAD project website: [www.nead.org.uk/schools/s4ga](http://www.nead.org.uk/schools/s4ga).

