



# Charter for Change

How **young people** will tackle the **climate crisis**.

A vision for the future by the  
BGF Alumni network



# What is the alumni network?

We are a group of young people who have graduated from the Bright Green Future programme. The BGF programme is an environmental training programme aimed at empowering young people aged between 14 and 17 who want to create a more sustainable future for our planet. It is a unique opportunity to learn about climate change and environmental protection, gain confidence, meet likeminded people and have an impact on their local communities.

In this charter, we describe the context which highlights the need for our network, our goals for this network, and the methods we plan to use to achieve these goals for a more sustainable path.

## Context

This Charter sets out the Bright Green Future Alumni Network's vision, goals, and strategic approach. Our primary mission is to empower young people to be effective environmental advocates and to support ongoing climate actions.

We need to deliver innovative solutions to overcome key challenges we face, such as youth disenfranchisement and systemic barriers. Climate change can seem like an unstoppable disaster, and the damage it threatens cannot be understated. Despite this, we believe that as a growing community spread across the entire country, we can turn the tide.

The current evidence suggests climate change will worsen human mortality, health, and development<sup>1</sup> with clear impacts already seen such as the 2020 American wildfires,

which burnt over 10m acres of land<sup>2</sup>, soil erosion of crop and pasture land in South America<sup>3</sup>, and the flooding caused by Storm Christoph in the UK. Estimates of the cost to human life climate change threatens ranges from the millions, to the billions.<sup>4</sup>

## Young people will inherit a climate emergency

Climate change is caused by our own activities, from unsustainable agriculture, to our overwhelming use of fossil fuels to power our economy and production of materials. Due to an increasing global middle-class, it is likely these over-consumption trends will continue.<sup>5</sup>

A BBC study found that 80% of children between 8 and 16 feel climate change is an important issue. 1 in 5 had even had nightmares about it.<sup>6</sup>

From the advocacy of Greta Thunberg to the Fridays for Future school strike movement, all over the world we are seeing a growing movement of young people deeply concerned about our climate. We need to harness this energy in young people from all backgrounds and give them the skills to make positive change happen in society.

However, youth disenfranchisement may prove a major issue, as shown by election statistics. In the 2009 local elections, only 10% of those aged 18-24 said they had voted, compared to 85% of those over 65. In the 2019 local elections, 47% of young people reported voting compared to 74% of those over 65.<sup>7</sup>

## Young people recognise this growing risk but feel **disempowered**

Who can blame them? With only 21 MPs in 2019 aged between 18-29, and the average age of parliament being 51<sup>9</sup>, what proof is there that young people's opinions matter? The situation worsens when you look further into the data showing an overall lack of diversity in government:

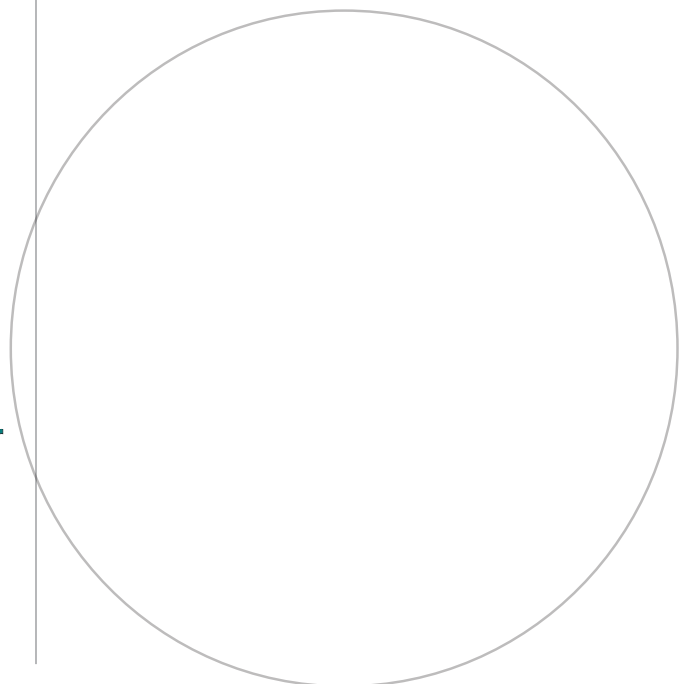
- Only **18%** of the cabinet are Black, brown and other minority ethnic.<sup>10</sup>
- Just **12 of the 220** women in parliament are Black.<sup>11</sup>
- Only **7%** of parliament openly identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>12</sup>
- Yet **29%** went to independent schools<sup>13</sup>

Due to this **low youth turnout** and an aging population, in 2005 Ipsos MORI calculated **the voting power of those over 55 to be four times that of people aged 18-34.**<sup>8</sup>

## Mental health is still a **major struggle for young people**

One in ten young people (10-16) were clinically diagnosed with a mental disorder in 2004.<sup>14</sup> On top of everyday pressures young people already face, the challenge of the climate emergency combined with a sense of powerlessness has driven a rise in "eco-anxiety". The COVID-19 pandemic has made situations worse - a survey into the impact of the pandemic on young people reported 1 in 4 have felt unable to cope with life.<sup>15</sup>

But the resources to support young people are limited: in 2015, over 60% of young people referred for help by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) **never** received treatment.<sup>16</sup>

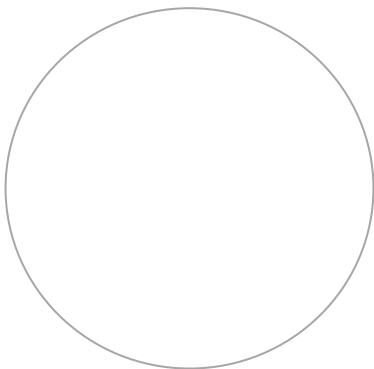




## Following on from the COVID-19 disaster, we must build back green

If COVID-19 has proven anything, it's that humanity can show remarkable strength in the face of uncertainty and fear. But after the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a massive pressure across the world to restart: restart the economy, restart our communities, restart life. Yet as is becoming critically apparent, our way of life is not sustainable. Our habits and activities are toxic for nature and ultimately for us. Landmark political decisions and incredible lifestyle changes are therefore required to prevent an environmental catastrophe.

Investing in **young people** will bring immediate and **long term benefits**



In a few short years, today's young people will be leading governments, markets, and communities, but the impact of an engaged and confident youth pays off before this hypothetical future. For example, participants in youth environmental leadership programs as part of the Our Bright Future partnership report an increased ability to manage anxiety, a greater appreciation for learning, and an improved sense of motivation <sup>17</sup>

Society's charge today is to teach this generation the skills required to grow into one which will continue to speak for and safeguard our environment. We need to develop a generation of leaders who are kind and proactive. It's a radical thought to many young people: that, though they are young, they can change the world.

## To summarize

Young people will bear the brunt of impacts from the Climate Emergency but they currently feel disenfranchised and unable to affect change in the current political system. Society is still reeling from the impacts of COVID-19, and the economic and social recovery from COVID-19 needs to be delivered so as to set the world up for a sustainable future. In this context, young people need to be empowered to affect positive change now, and as leaders of the future.







## Our mission and strategic objectives

**As members of the BGF Alumni Network, our mission is to empower young people to be effective environmental advocates and to support ongoing climate actions.**

Our aim is to sustain the momentum generated amongst young people through the BGF programme, and the Fridays for Future climate strikes, and influence and inspire current and alumni BGF students as well as any young person who is driven to make positive changes within their community and the planet as a whole.

## Strategic priorities

- We want to **engage the population in activism** of any form, no matter how big or small

Despite the fact that Government polls show climate change denial is now scarce in the UK<sup>18</sup> and that the climate emergency will impact every country, no matter how wealthy.<sup>19</sup>

Widespread environmental action has still been limited as people don't believe that they can generate significant change.<sup>20</sup> The Alumni Network believes is the wrong narrative to promote and that even small actions can make a difference- and perhaps most importantly, we need to show that change can be achieved outside of government.

- We want to increase **political engagement** amongst **young people**

Government action in the UK has in the past been slow and ineffective, and the UK government itself is not representative of the general population, with women, Black, brown and other minority ethnic groups, individuals from less wealthy backgrounds, and younger people all being underrepresented<sup>21</sup>

In the 2019 general election, the turnout for 18-24 year olds was just 47% compared to 74% of the over 65s.<sup>22</sup> We need to empower young people to use their vote and to proactively engage with local and national politics so that they can push for the change they want to see.

- Sustain the momentum of the **climate strikes** and **hold governments to account**

The climate strikes were an effective way of highlighting the shortfalls of current governments globally. However, new strategies are now needed during the pandemic to lobby governments<sup>23</sup> and shift the attention of decision makers back to the urgency of climate change. As highlighted in 2021 by Bill Gates<sup>24</sup>, the climate crisis is a much more complex and difficult issue to solve than COVID-19 so will inevitably require even more attention immediately and in the long term. We must also stress that climate change cannot be tackled on a national level: it requires an international approach to reflect how the crisis in itself is borderless.

We must use our digital voice to point out areas where the government is failing us, and how this can be improved. Digital platforms provide us with an opportunity to reach a wider audience, and could encourage more people to voice their own concerns.

We also need to demonstrate the value of holding governments to account through civil action. We know that this is possible, as many successful movements and campaigns which have fundamentally improved society have been grassroots in origin such as the Suffragette movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the School Strikes for Climate.

- Hold **businesses to account**

It is vital that we engage businesses in the benefits of decarbonisation - in particular those with significant carbon footprints - highlighting the co-benefits for business and wider society.

It's important that businesses and governments know that investment in mitigation right now can reap significant future economic benefits.<sup>25</sup> Investing in our future will be far less costly than dealing with the consequences of climate change.<sup>26</sup>

- Promote the **importance of small, random acts of kindness**

"There is no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end" (Scott Adams)

The BGF Alumni Network believes that any positive action, no matter how small, can have a big impact. Small actions can inspire and generate ripple effects towards even more small actions or larger ones too, much like random acts of kindness. More random acts of kindness towards the environment are needed, even if you can't see the immediate impact, as the cumulative effect can be huge. By promoting this narrative, more individuals will feel encouraged and empowered to make small changes, as the notion of radical change can often be off-putting and feel unachievable.







## Practical Action

Now we have explained who we are and what we believe in it is important to identify some key first practical steps that can be taken to contribute to a sustainable society.

These suggested actions are not just for BGF Alumni to take on, but for any young people looking to make change happen!

### Facilitate the uptake of existing initiatives

#### Study and map what initiatives work well where.

It is important to understand how we can efficiently make change happen in different communities and geographies. Therefore using existing research, it would be possible to investigate the effectiveness of different strategies in different geographies and demographics, and map these to highlight where different strategies should be targeted.

Things to consider: What initiatives went well and what could be done differently? How can this improve future efforts?

### Who do we want to reach?

- Everyone! We can all engage in climate action, you don't have to be an 'activist'.
- Young people- as we will inherit the climate crisis.
- Grassroots projects and communities.
- Politicians and decision makers at all levels of society.
- Businesses, at local, national and international levels, especially those with large environmental footprints.
- Teachers and educators.

## Promote existing campaigns and initiatives

An example of this is to help reduce local food waste by collaborating with a food waste initiative or charity. You could provide advice in your community, help spread engagement, help a food waste app gain popularity, help a school reduce its food waste, increase involvement with allotments or increase gardening efforts. Some examples of food waste charities and initiatives:

- WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme)
- Fare Share
- Love Food Hate Waste
- Ellen McArthur Foundation
- Food Cycle
- Sustain
- Olio
- Too Good to Go

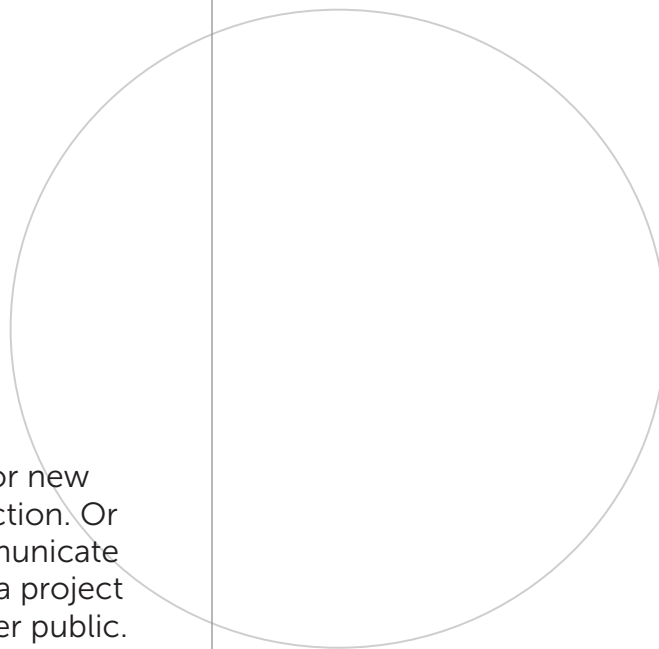
## Create artwork

Produce artwork for existing or new initiatives to inspire positive action. Or use art as a tool to help communicate issues that you care about or a project you are involved with the wider public. This is a good way to address serious issues without creating a depressing and overwhelming atmosphere.

Examples: Local statues made of recycled materials to promote recycling, posters to highlight key issues and inform people on climate change.

## Convene a community-wide climate initiative

You may have lots of existing green organisations and climate initiatives in your area. To promote collaboration and sharing of ideas and learning, you could convene a community-wide network of climate and environmental initiatives and organisations!





## Lobbying and activism

### Research

Explore what the most effective ways to lobby is. What tools are currently available to achieve this? How are people lobbying governments and businesses online? Research how efficient and environmental companies are and provide suggestions for improvement, for example a supermarket chain.

### Political Action

Email or write a letter to a local politician or to a company, advise others to do the same (do thorough research on the politician/company you are contacting and the topic you are contacting them about first).

### Use **social media** to **raise awareness**

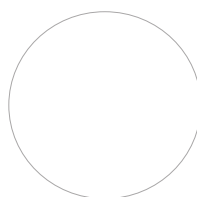
Social media is the key to raising awareness and inspiring action. Create a page on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook which can gain publicity and raise awareness on a particular topic.

## Offer energy efficiency advice

Create a document advising someone how they can make their home energy efficient and low carbon for an individual, school or organisation.

## Increase awareness of **youth impact**

A young person's voice is just as important as everybody else's. Increasing awareness of different ways people can have their voice heard and movements they can be involved with such as UpRising and Catalyse Change could be really valuable. It would then be possible to distribute this through schools or social media which in turn will engage more people in politics and activism and sustain climate strike momentum.



## Citations

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- 19 (See WWF, n.d).
- 20 (Rogers de Waal and Huppert, 2020),
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- 24 (Bill Gates, 2021) <https://www.gatesnotes.com/Energy/Climate-and-COVID-19>
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