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Greener British Future

A submission to ippr's Britain's Got Brains competition

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Challenging ideas – Changing policy

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'Britain's Got Brains'

Britain's Got Brains is a new annual competition run by ippr that aims to identify and promote rigorous, original and exciting policy ideas from postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers in British universities who may or may not be working in the policy sphere already. The judging panel for this competition includes a wide range of influential politicians, policymakers, journalists, thinkers and academics.

This paper is one of four papers shortlisted by the judges of the 2008 Britain's Got Brains competition. The competition will be run again in 2009. For further details, please visit www.ippr.org/britainsgotbrains.

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About the author

Lewis Dean is a PhD student in the School of Biology at the University of St Andrews. Working on a cross-disciplinary, multi-national grant, he works with apes and monkeys examining learning strategies and the evolution of human culture. Having graduated with a degree in zoology in 2006, he gained a range of experience including accountancy and teaching while applying for post-graduate courses. Outside his studies Lewis is involved in public engagement in science as a Science and Engineering Ambassador.

Introduction

This report examines how environmental issues are being tackled in the United Kingdom. It then proposes a nationwide and broadly focused scheme that would enable local communities to compete against one another, building on the experience of schemes that are already up and running in communities across Britain. The report examines why some initiatives have worked, why some have not worked and how the public should be engaged to facilitate widespread behavioural change.

The Greener British Future (GB Future) competition, proposed in the report, aims to address the need for a nationally operated scheme which inspires, rather than compels, individuals to alter their behaviour to a more sustainable lifestyle. The competition would operate at a community level, with communities competing regionally and nationally to win prizes. The competition aims to inspire communities within the UK to tackle a range of environmental issues by designing and implementing their own solutions.

Background: interest in the environment and politicians' role

Interest in global environmental problems is soaring among both politicians and the public. Awareness of environmental issues has led governments around the world to implement changes in policy to reduce the impact that industries and households are having on the planet. However, we are a long way from a consensus on environmental issues and how to tackle them (Lockwood *et al* 2008).

Over the past few years, British political parties have been keen to take on board the evidence that has been provided to them to advocate action to mitigate global climate change. There is currently a Government Climate Change Bill making its passage through Parliament which will aim to reduce carbon emissions by 60 per cent within 40 years. In order to tackle climate change and other global environmental issues, such as habitat loss for animals and plants, pollution, excessive water use and waste disposal, measures will need to be implemented that are likely to have substantial impacts on the way in which the population of the United Kingdom lives its daily life.

However, political parties have had to be particularly careful when advocating measures to address environmental problems. Policy implementation continues to be difficult (Lockwood *et al* 2008) as government-imposed measures are often unpopular. The majority of the population are not willing to be compelled, by taxation or regulation, to adopt measures that may be perceived as reducing quality of life or altering familiar lifestyles. For politicians with an eye on re-election, pushing through unpopular measures may have wider political consequences. Therefore, governments' ability to effectively tackle environmental issues is constrained by public opinion.

Within the United Kingdom there are a number of grassroots campaigns that operate by changing the attitudes of individuals, in order that they will voluntarily alter their behaviour patterns, thus eliminating the compulsion of regulation and taxation. These kinds of scheme operate at a small scale at present within individual communities or groups of communities. However, in order to effectively tackle global environmental issues widespread behavioural change is required. This report aims to set out an environment scheme that will operate nationally to tackle a range of environmental issues, by appealing to individuals to voluntarily alter their behaviour patterns.

Structure of the report

The first section of this report examines the issues involved in changing public behaviour around climate change. It will consider how the public has been made aware of the issues surrounding global environmental issues, by highlighting some of the information that is currently in the public domain and has been reported on in the media. It will go on to examine some of the factors that have inhibited widespread public behavioural change.

The second and third sections examine existing UK schemes, local and national respectively, to change public behaviour. They provide case studies of a range of schemes to give a flavour of what is already being achieved. Section 4 outlines proposals for the Greener British Future (GB Future) competition, followed by a fifth, concluding, section.

1. The context: changing public behaviour

The impacts of global climate change have been well publicised in recent years. The situation has been documented in reports from a range of academic and scientific sources. These, in turn, are widely reported in the media and commented upon by politicians – for example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s reports on the likely impacts of climate change (IPCC 2007), the Stern report (Stern 2006) and Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Yet governments around the world and the public *en masse* have been slow to act on these concerns. There remains what Lockwood *et al* (2008) label ‘a paradox in British politics’. The public is concerned about the environment, but seemingly unwilling to be penalised by adopting a more environmentally friendly lifestyle – paying more for everyday tasks, such as driving, and indulging less in luxury items and activities such as overseas holidays – for benefits that may not be obvious.

This paradox has resulted in a caution by UK politicians to implement policies that may be seen as degrading the standard of living for the population.

Take the example of road pricing, or road user charging. Road pricing was considered as a possible policy to reduce congestion and carbon dioxide emissions from road vehicles. There are advocates for the policy within government and business, as well as the environmental community (Bird and Morris 2006). However, in 2006 an e-petition was set up on the No. 10 Downing Street website which called for the Prime Minister to ‘scrap the planned vehicle tracking and road pricing policy’ and which eventually received 1.8 million signatures. Objections to the scheme included a perceived loss of freedom, fear that the Government would be tracking movements, and that the scheme was a stealth tax on drivers that would not deliver any real benefits (*ibid*).

Then in spring 2008 the Government faced pressure over car taxation. Prior to this, the Government had implemented reforms to car taxes, in which the fee was based upon the carbon emissions of the vehicle. The reforms were criticised by opposition parties and the media for being unfair. Concerns about the tax centred on claims that the hardest-hit would be poorer families who own older cars (Winnett 2008). Both opposition and Labour MPs put pressure on the Government to reconsider the policy, for the reason that it penalised the public for what they deemed an essential component of everyday life.

These two examples illustrate how unpopular schemes are that the public feels penalises them financially and lowers their quality of life. They erode public trust in environmental policies and reinforce the idea that environmentalism is incompatible with modern living. A YouGov poll commissioned by the *Daily Telegraph* in 2006 indicated that respondents were more likely to consider taking steps such as insulating their houses than, for example, taking fewer holidays abroad (YouGov 2006).

For an environmental scheme to gain widespread public support, therefore, it would need as far as possible to be one that people do not perceive to reduce their quality of life or spending power. A successful scheme needs to have obvious benefits for the public, either financial benefits or in terms of overall well-being.

Another factor for the public is the belief that climate change and other environmental issues will not affect them. In the same 2006 YouGov poll 47 per cent of respondents believed that their lives would be affected negatively by climate change, but 71 per cent of respondents believed that their children or grandchildren would be negatively affected by climate change. If environmental issues are not perceived to affect the current population then the will to change behaviour is reduced.

Similarly, environmental legislation, such as the Climate Change Bill, sets long time spans. This Bill states that carbon emissions should be reduced by 60 per cent by 2050 (Defra 2008). Although this is a very significant target, its potential impact may well be reduced because of the public perception that there is over 40 years in which to accomplish it – the conclusion may be that future generations can deal with the problem. To gain public support a scheme needs to offer benefits in real time, with goals that are not too distant, and rewards for working towards goals as well as achieving them.

Some parts of the public might also perceive that their local environment is being sacrificed for the global environment. An example of this objection is seen in the 'Highlands Before Pylons' campaign, which seeks to maintain the scenery of the Scottish Highlands for the sake of their natural beauty, objecting to schemes such as wind farms (Highlands Before Pylons 2008). Campaigners have been keen to point out that they are not against alternative energy; they simply think that the Highlands are not the place for this type of large-scale activity, which would make a strong mark on the landscape.

In summary, in order to encourage widespread public involvement and behavioural change, there is a need for policies that are perceived to improve quality of life, simple to carry out, and that are focused on individual communities, giving benefits to local people. If these criteria are met then it is more likely that individuals will change their behaviour and live in a more sustainable fashion.

2. Lessons from local schemes already in operation

There are a number of locally-based environmental schemes already in operation in the UK, the lessons from a selection of which are discussed below.

WyeCycle

The WyeCycle scheme – see www.wyecycle.co.uk – was founded in 1989 in the villages of Wye and Brook, near Ashford in Kent. It is a small-scale scheme which handles waste from about 1200 households. The organisation estimates that the average amount of waste now going to landfill is about 260 kg per household per year, among the lowest in the UK.

The WyeCycle collection collects recyclables such as paper, glass and metal. It makes separate collections of garden waste, kitchen waste and WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment). Large items such as furniture can be collected by arrangement. The scheme also runs a swap shop, through which locals can swap items that they no longer require. Compost produced from garden and kitchen waste is sold by WyeCycle to gardeners.

The WyeCycle scheme has also initiated other projects in the Wye area. A local hardware shop refills empty containers with new products. Wye Farmers Market, founded by WyeCycle, gives the community the opportunity to purchase local food (Wye Farmers Market 2008). WyeCycle has also converted its vehicles to run on biodiesel made from recycled cooking oil.

WyeCycle offers the villages of Wye and Brook a comprehensive green waste management system. The community has not only reduced its waste level, but through local initiatives has an outlook that is more attuned to and aware of environmental issues. A community farm has been founded, aiming to raise livestock around the village (Wye Community Farm 2008).

Although the scheme suits Wye and Brook very well, it may not suit all communities as it benefits from operating at a small scale. The collection and sorting of items is labour and time intensive; a larger operation may not be economically viable. The scheme has also taken many years to develop. It had to register as a waste carrier and is reliant on support from local councils and other organisations.

While it may not be transferable to all communities, valuable lessons can be taken from the scheme. Community enthusiasm for one scheme (in this case kerbside recycling collections) can over time inspire a range of other green schemes. The involvement of the community in projects can provide benefits in the form of services such as cheap waste disposal, swap shops and local food markets.

The Greening Campaign

The Greening Campaign – see www.greening-campaign.co.uk – was founded by Terena Plowright in Petersfield, Hampshire. The campaign aims to encourage communities to reduce their energy consumption and, thus, their carbon footprint. The scheme has now spread to other communities in the area (Greening Campaign 2008).

Individuals can sign up for the scheme, and they are given support to encourage others within their community to reduce their carbon emissions. The Greening Campaign offers cards that give advice on easy ways to reduce carbon emissions and assists with the running of events in communities to reinforce the message. These events include film screenings, displays and public meetings. Groups within the community, such as schools, businesses, churches and local councils, are encouraged to get involved.

There have been some successful results. For example, the scheme resulted in a reduction of Petersfield's carbon footprint by 23 tonnes of CO₂. However, as it is only aimed at reducing carbon emissions it is quite limited in scope. It has no competitive or reward element to inspire the community to become greener, which we suggest should form part of a nationwide scheme (see Section 4).

Transition Communities

The Transition Communities scheme has a slightly different aim to the Greening Campaign, but a similar model. It aims to wean communities off oil consumption in order to reduce fossil fuel dependence and greenhouse gas emissions. The scheme also relies on community involvement (Brangwyn and Hopkins 2008) and communities across the UK are encouraged to join. The local organising committee has to fill certain criteria, such as attendance at a training course, understanding of the aims of the scheme and ideally a link to the local council.

Communities across Britain have already joined the Transition Communities scheme. Totnes in Devon was the first to initiate the scheme in 2005. Like the Greening Campaign, the Transition Communities initiative aims to educate local people, businesses and local government to reduce their energy consumption. By joining the Transition Communities scheme, local volunteers get to benefit from resources such as training courses for leaders, resources for the community and the potential to be involved in combined fundraising applications to bodies such as the National Lottery.

The Transition Communities scheme requires individuals to subscribe to a particular set of environmental and political principles which might not suit all communities. And while carbon reduction remains a key environmental aim, there are other aims that this scheme does not address directly, such as waste reduction and water conservation.

Green Streets

In 2008, British Gas and ippr set up a social experiment in which 64 households in eight neighbourhoods across Britain are competing to win £50,000 to invest in making a community building greener (Eccleston 2008). The scheme allows households to have a free energy efficiency audit carried out by British Gas. The audit identifies energy inefficiencies and advises households on ways to save energy. Each street was given a budget of £30,000 to spend on making their energy savings in its designated eight households and a target of a 30 per cent energy reduction (ippr 2008).

The scheme has the potential to be rolled out across the UK, with ippr estimating that employing an adviser for every 20 streets in the UK would cost £500 million per year, but could save £4.6 billion in wasted energy.

By encouraging government funding of such a scheme, it is hoped that energy companies could also be encouraged to invest. By offering communities across the UK the chance to compete against one another, Green Streets gives incentive and reward for winners. The street with the largest cut in carbon emissions wins a financial prize. This sense of competition is likely to inspire communities to win against competitors, with the by-product being a change in behaviour. The project is, however, focused only on energy reduction of households. Although household energy use makes up 27 per cent of carbon emissions, there are ways in which the scope of the competition could be broadened beyond households and beyond carbon emissions.

These schemes demonstrate that there are a number of ways in which green initiatives can be implemented. Others include walking bus and car sharing schemes that give schools, businesses and local councils the chance to reduce congestion and carbon emissions (Safe Kids Walking 2005, National Carshare 2007). All of the schemes we have discussed require a community to sign up to a particular philosophy, which they can then tailor to their community.

3. Lessons from a national community-based competition: Britain in Bloom

Britain in Bloom is an annual competition which was founded in 1963 by the British Tourist Board, and is now administered by the Royal Horticultural Society.

The competition aims to inspire communities to come together to improve their local town or village through tidying their area and greening their streets and parks by planting and tending plants. The competition also aims to bring communities together by encouraging, and judging the extent of, community involvement, their enthusiasm for horticulture, environmental friendliness and the sustainability of the schemes that have been put in place.

Communities are judged first at a regional level. The competition is also divided into eight size categories from 'small village' to 'large city'. Coastal towns and urban communities have their own categories. The region can then nominate a number of communities into the national competition. The following year, the community is judged using the same criteria as the regional competition. A national winner is selected for each size category and a 'Champion of Champions' is also crowned.

The strength of the Britain in Bloom structure is that it allows individual communities to draw up their own action plans, secure appropriate funding and execute their plans according to their own needs. Support networks exist within the regional organisation, which can be used to give specialised local advice to the communities in the competition. The separation of size categories allows communities a fairer competition.

The competition has survived for over 40 years because it inspires settlements to come together as a community to compete, there are tangible benefits to the local community from community cohesion, visibly improved streets and awards that can be displayed in halls and on road signs. These principles make the format ideal to apply in other contexts.

4. Greener British Future: a proposal for a national, community-based environmental competition

As we have seen, public opposition to government-imposed schemes that penalise individuals into green behaviours means that there is a need to inspire people to adopt green lifestyles and show them the benefits and rewards of doing so. Environmental schemes that promote community involvement and competition seem to be the most successful approach.

In this section we now propose such a scheme: Greener British (GB) Future. The idea is to inspire communities to act together to change to a more environmentally sustainable way of life, by rewarding communities rather than penalising individuals. The competition will differ from other environmental schemes in the way that it focuses more widely than energy use within the home, and in its method of competitively scoring communities based on their level of community involvement. Local organisers will have to tailor the scheme to appeal to as many members of the local community as possible: one of the aims is to bring communities together.

Environmental issues aside from domestic energy use that the GB Future competition would include are domestic waste, water conservation, and species extinction in local areas:

- In 2006/07 the UK sent over 70 per cent of its waste to landfill, compared with the Netherlands at under 10 per cent (Defra 2008).
- If climate change results in less, or more irregular, rainfall, then water conservation will be vitally important to ensure that a water supply is maintained without damaging sources such as rivers and aquifers.

- Habitat loss has caused a decline in farmland birds over the last 30 years (RSPB 2007), and, similarly, there have been large falls reported in butterfly populations in the UK (Butterfly Conservation 2008).

By encouraging local communities to address these issues, for example by helping to identify and conserve locally endangered species, they can get involved collectively in education, conservation and healthy outdoor pursuits.

Competition organisation and funding

The competition would be administered in a similar manner to Britain in Bloom, with regional bodies administering the competition within their area. Initially eight regional bodies would be formed (South East, South West, Wales, Midlands and East Anglia, North East, North West, Scotland and Northern Ireland). Additional regional bodies could be formed if demand in a region were particularly high. A head office would administer the national competition and coordinate the regional offices.

Regional contracts would be put out to tender to public bodies and companies with experience of public administration. This would follow the model of other schemes such as the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Network (STEMNET), which already operate this system (STEMNET 2008). Contracts to run the GB Future competition would be awarded for a three-year period.

Regional offices would have responsibility for organising and judging local competitions, for supporting communities that were entered in the competition and for entering top-performing communities into the national competition.

Funding for the national and regional organisation of the competition should be achieved through a public-private partnership. Given that this competition could contribute to the UK government meeting its greenhouse gas emission targets and reducing waste costs, GB Future could be eligible for funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Private sponsorship for the competition could be sought from energy companies. To increase the attractiveness of the proposition, tax breaks could be offered on sponsorship of the scheme.

Although the regional and national offices would be funded by the public-private partnership, individual community bodies would be required to seek their own funding, from public bodies and private sponsorship.

In order to make it easier for community bodies to apply for funding, the national office would maintain a website that contained details of funding opportunities. Organisations that offer funding for environmental schemes should be encouraged to join the national list, via the Sustainable Development Commission and Defra. There is also existing information on funding that is available and would be relevant to the GB Future competition, from the Sustainable Development Commission (Sustainable Development Commission 2008) and Britain in Bloom (Britain in Bloom 2008).

A number of small-scale environmental schemes throughout the UK currently receive funding from local councils, local businesses and national non-governmental organisations. Regional offices for the GB Future competition could gather and list organisations that offer funding within regions. They would be expected to form links with local business organisations and encourage businesses in the region to donate to community bodies to assist their efforts. In addition, regional offices would be involved in assisting community bodies by matching them to funding and checking applications.

Judging

The competition would require the subjective judgement of qualified and experienced judges, in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Academics and consultants in university departments and registered environmental consultancies would be targeted in a recruitment and advertising drive as the competition is set up. These individuals would then be asked to judge in their local region, with highly qualified individuals also being asked to judge at a national level.

The regional offices would be responsible for recruiting the judges for the regional competitions. Although it is anticipated that these judges would be paid for the time that they spend directly

employed by the scheme, they would not be employed full-time. A national training programme would be necessary, with training workshops for judges on the rules and criteria of the competition. From time to time, judges from other regions would be asked to 'moderate' the judging team of another region.

The scheme is designed to allow the judges to modify and update the criteria as the scheme progresses, in reaction to scientific and technical advancements in the field. This could be done at an annual workshop.

Community involvement in other environmental schemes, such as the Greening Campaign or a walking bus scheme, would not prohibit a community from entering the GB Future competition and the environmental benefits from other schemes would be counted by the GB Future judges.

Advertising

The GB Future competition would need to be advertised by both national and regional offices to ensure communities know about it. However, as this is an environmental competition, the use of paper should be kept to a minimum. Advertising could therefore be carried out through a number of different media, aimed at all age ranges, including social networking sites, which would also have the advantage of being low- or no-cost. Groups on these sites could be used to advertise the competition and also provide a forum for asking questions and discussion.

The competition could also be promoted to people with an existing interest in environmental issues, by asking environmental organisations with large membership bodies, such as the RSPB and the National Trust, to advertise it to their members.

By promoting the competition through schools, particularly primary schools, further large numbers in a community could be targeted. Encouraging schools to take part in the competition, as part of wider community involvement, could integrate the competition into education on issues of climate change.

Judging criteria

Two regional judges would visit the communities being judged. Within each region the communities would be divided by their size. Communities could be classified as:

- Villages (<1000 inhabitants)
- Large villages (1000–3000)
- Small towns (3001–6000)
- Towns (6001–12,000)
- Large towns (12,001–80,000)
- Cities (80,001–200,000)
- Large cities (>200,000).

Communities within large towns or cities would be able to compete against one another in an urban area category.

The judges would be asked to rate communities based on quantitative and qualitative criteria:

- *Level of domestic carbon emissions*: this would be judged based on the electricity and gas consumption in the calendar year.

To avoid intrusion into peoples' personal information the judges would see only a total unit measurement, rather than household-level information. Households that are competing would be asked to submit the number of units that they were charged for in the financial year preceding the year of judgement (that is, from 1 April the preceding year to 1 April in the year in which the community is being judged). Energy companies would be asked to verify if the figure given by the householder matched their records of the number of units charged for.

- *Level of carbon emissions from transport:* this would be estimated from local initiatives such as car sharing and walking buses. The level of participation in these schemes would be used as a proxy by which carbon emissions could be calculated.
- *Levels of waste and recycling:* this would be calculated from records of collections by local councils and from local recycling schemes.
- *Local food production and supply:* the amount of food grown locally that is being made available locally through supply chains such as vegetable boxes, local farm shops or through community gardens, would be judged. Levels of participation in these schemes would also be judged.
- *Quality of the local environment:* the use of local gardens and parks and those areas' ecological value would be judged. For example, a local park that sets aside some area for a 'wild' area would be judged ahead of a park that is set aside to grass only and is well maintained. The involvement of the community in areas of public space would be judged by participation in schemes such as community gardens.
- *Water conservation:* the amount of water used would be judged in the same way that gas and electricity consumption are measured: the units from the houses which take part in the scheme would be totalled and presented to the judges. The judges would also assess any schemes such as settlement ponds or rainwater retrieval that are in place.

All of these schemes would also be judged by their level of community involvement, in terms of how many households submit their details to the judging committee. The level of involvement in individual initiatives within the community would be examined by 'spot checking' houses and talking to individual participating residents, rather than to the organisers.

Although the judges would work to criteria set out at national level, they would also be dependent on the yearly criteria drawn up by the panel of judges, who would be selected from experts in the field. Thus, although there would be consistency in the topics on which communities are judged, the competition would only remain relevant if judges and local communities were up to date with research and international policy advice. This would be updated via email to the local organisers.

Awards

Awards would be given to communities that have reached a level specified by the national judging panel each year. Bronze, silver and gold awards would be given at a regional level. The regional awards would be judged in spring and early summer.

Each region would be required to enter one community for each size category for the national-level competition; in addition the region would be able to enter a further four communities into the national competition. These could be selected from any size category.

At the national level a pair of judges from separate regions would be asked to judge a particular size category. The national competition would be judged in the autumn of the year in which the community qualified: the same year in which it won a place in the national competition. The judging criteria for the national competition would be the same as for the regional competition.

At national level a champion and runner-up would be selected for each size category. From the winners of the size categories, a champion of champions would be selected. A national awards ceremony would be scheduled to take place in December each year.

5. Conclusions

The Greener British Future competition is designed to provide motivation to communities to tackle a range of environmental issues. Although there is widespread awareness of environmental issues among the public, motivation to take action that is perceived to reduce spending power or reduce quality of life is low.

The GB Future competition aims to appeal to communities by engaging them in competition with other communities throughout the UK. By providing a support network for local communities through which they could find funding and advice, the aim is to provide an easy and enjoyable way in which communities could alter their behaviour.

The competition is designed to help the UK through changing its citizens' behaviour, to reduce carbon emissions, waste production and water usage, to promote recycling, and to increase biodiversity and environmental awareness. Thus it could help the Government reach domestic and international environmental targets.

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