

Bridging the Gap

Barriers and solutions for young people entering the environmental sector

Appendix

Tomorrow’s Natural Leaders, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
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Ribblehead Viaduct by Tim Hill (Pixabay)

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Bridging the Gap conference

Methods

On 12 August 2020 (International Youth Day), the TNLs hosted a conference on Zoom entitled ‘Bridging the Gap: Barriers and solutions for young people entering the environmental sector’. Tickets were free and made accessible via Eventbrite. A hundred tickets were made available; these

sold out, although c. 50 of these attendees showed up to the conference (some had to leave early). There were additionally eight TNL or TNL staff facilitators, several TNL staff, two speakers and several other participants who attended without requiring a ticket.

Information about the conference (and the Eventbrite link) was shared in a targeted way to ensure that the audience would be a mixture of young people interested in entering the environmental sector and representatives of ESOs. TNLs used their various youth networks (e.g. university student groups on social media) to attract young participants. ESOs were contacted primarily by including the Eventbrite link in emails sent out to share the ESO survey.

We were keen for the conference to be more interactive than a webinar so we used the normal Zoom meeting function and had discussions in breakout rooms, which are sub-groups of participants. There were two breakout room discussions: one on diversity (e.g. ethnic) in the environmental sector and another on general barriers faced by young people entering the environmental sector and possible solutions that could be implemented by young people, ESOs or wider society. Each session had eight breakout rooms, with each room facilitated by a TNL (or in one case a TNL staff member). Breakout room discussions were given a 20-minute limit. Points arising from the discussion were compiled on Trello boards.

The conference included three main presentations by Mya-Rose Craig (a.k.a. Birdgirl), Joshua Styles and Stephanie Lynch of Groundwork UK. Sam Buckton also gave a short presentation summarising the results so far of the ESO survey. A poll was conducted at the beginning of the conference to gauge the composition of the audience and baseline knowledge, and also at the end to gain some feedback on the conference, what was enjoyed, and what had been learnt. See 'Results and discussion' for the questions asked. The PowerPoint presentation used during the conference can be viewed here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1anIGJOKZPUTUtlog-FXuUB-h4WLQpqOV/view?usp=sharing>

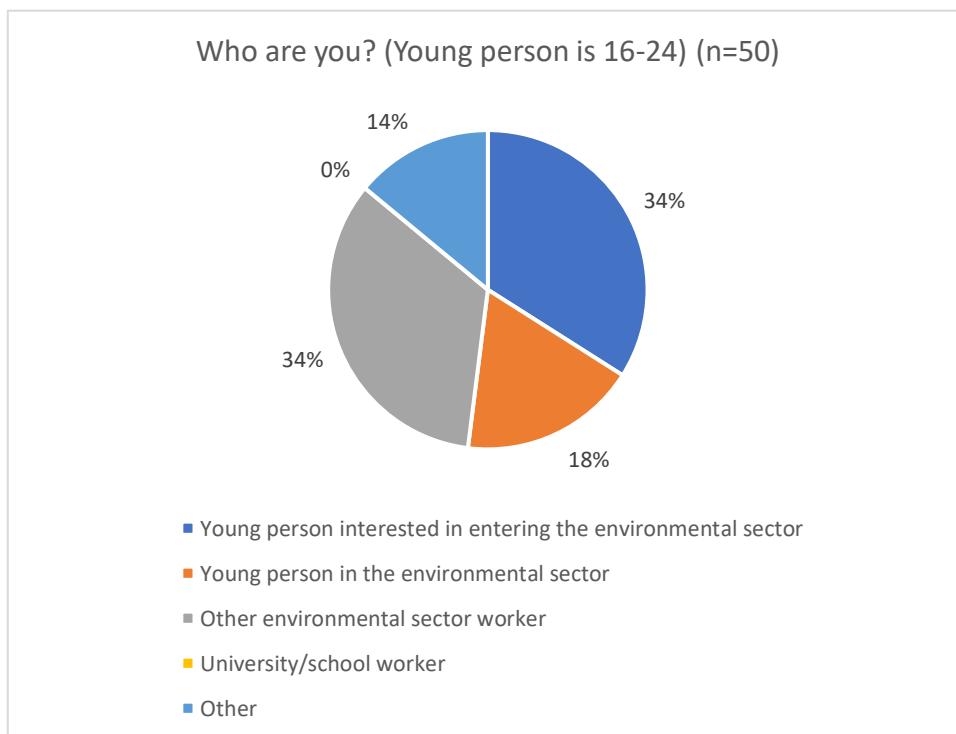
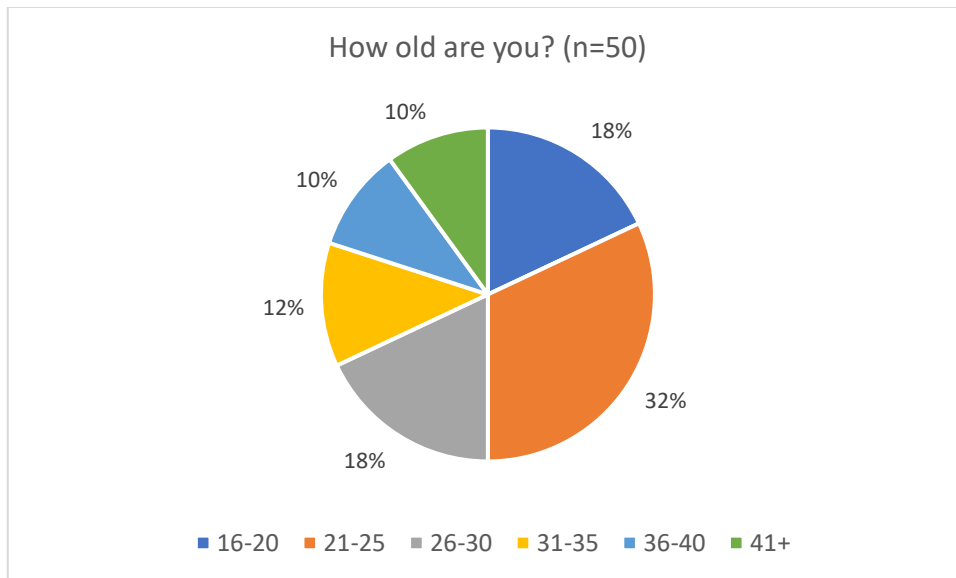
A brief SurveyMonkey feedback survey was sent round to attendees after the conference via Eventbrite (see 'Results and discussion' for the questions asked) to add detail to the feedback poll presented during the conference.

Graphs of survey results were created in Excel.

Poll results and evaluation

Starting poll results

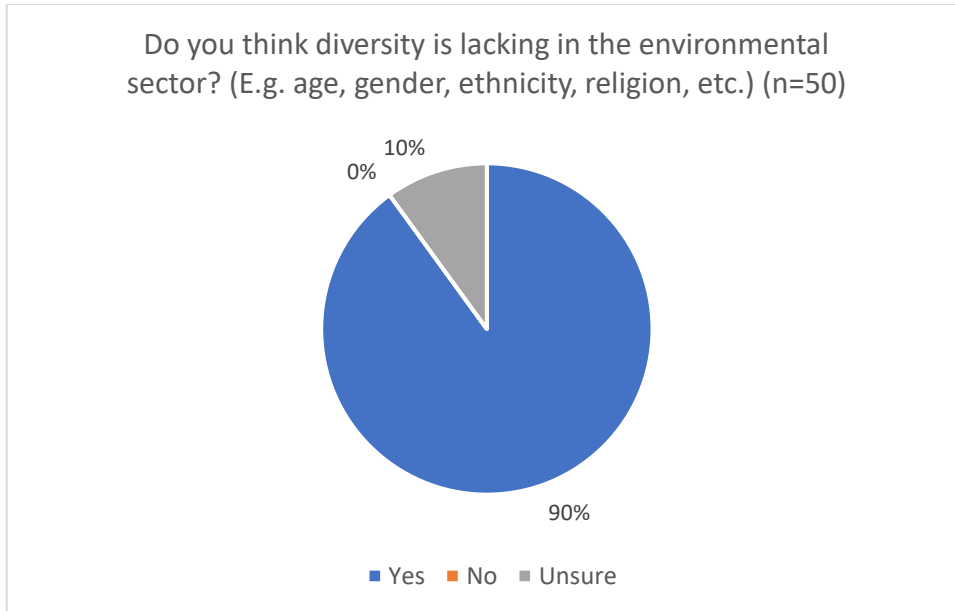
Audience composition



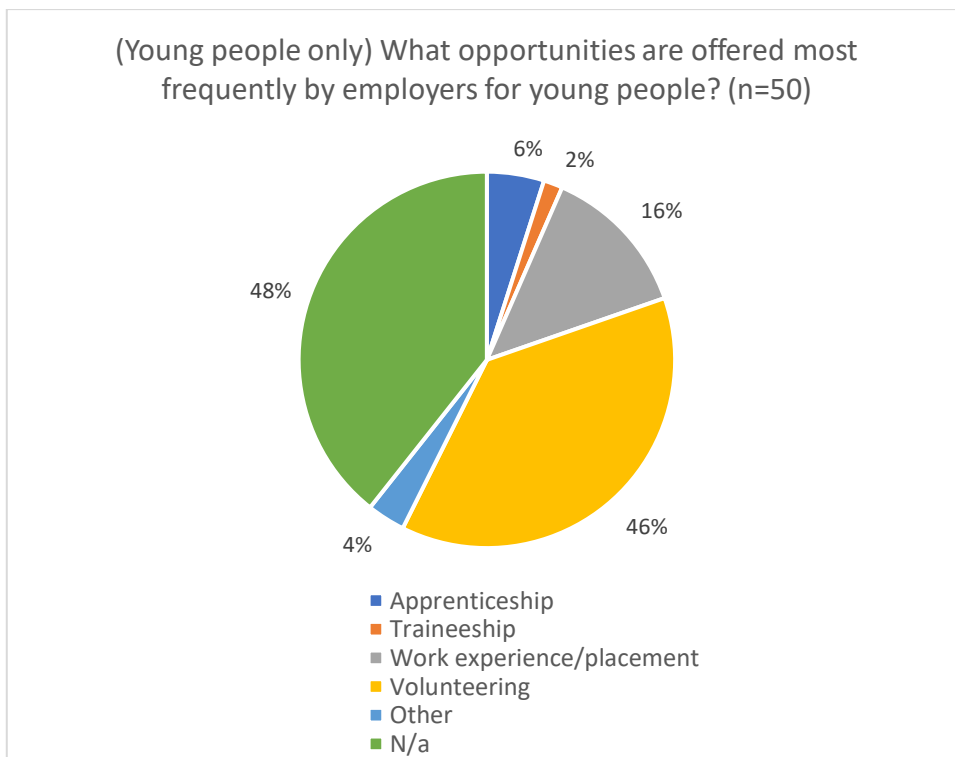
The conference audience composition broadly matched our aims.

Baseline knowledge

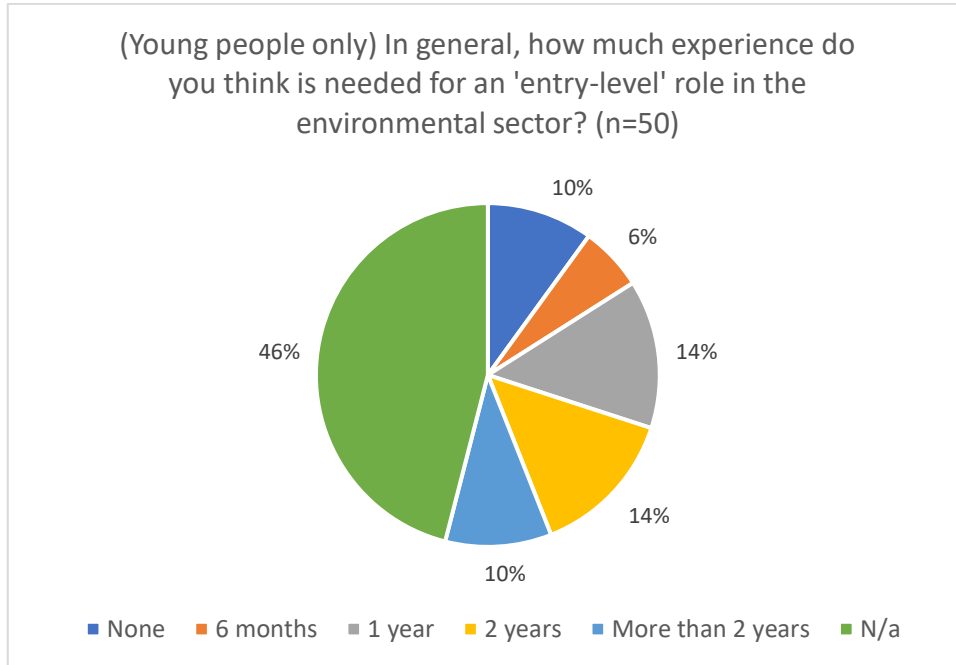
We were interested to know what the pre-existing perceptions of the audience were regarding diversity in the environmental sector, opportunities offered for young people by ESOs and previous experience required for environmental sector jobs.



There was already a strong perception that diversity was lacking in the environmental sector.

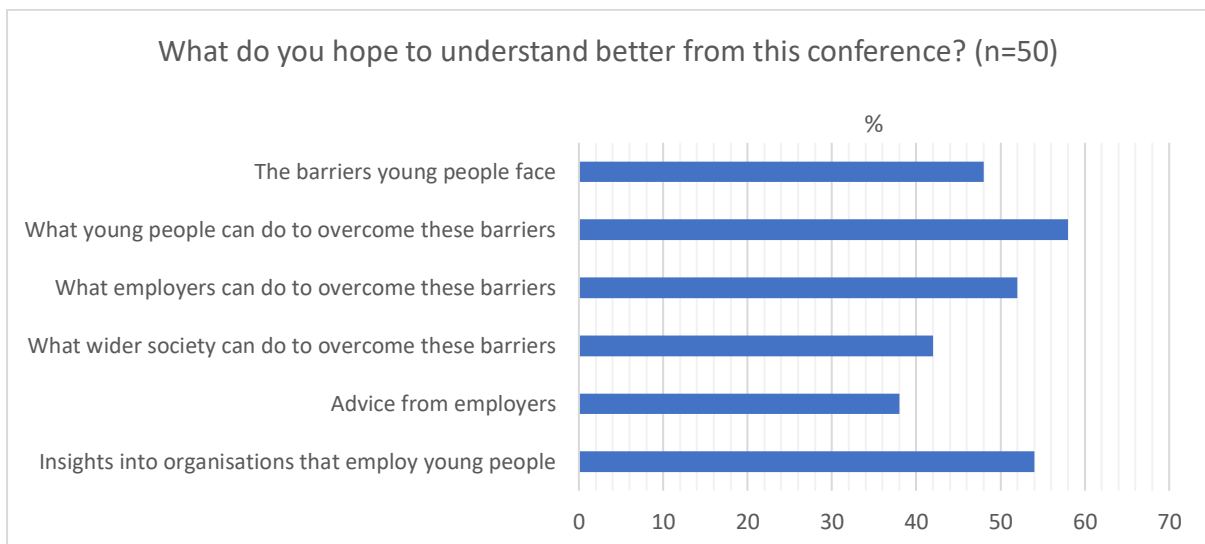


Young people widely believed, based on personal experience or otherwise, that volunteering was the most commonly offered opportunity by ESOs for young people. It is true that volunteering is commonly offered (see 'Survey for environmental sector organisations') but it was not appreciated that work experience/placements are just as commonly offered. Note that the 'N/a' responses were from audience members who were not young people.



Young people were fairly evenly split between the different options; it was not appreciated how frequently no previous experience is required for an entry-level job (see 'Survey for environmental sector organisations' below) – indeed, this should arguably be the definition of a true entry-level job. Note that the 'N/a' responses were from audience members who were not young people.

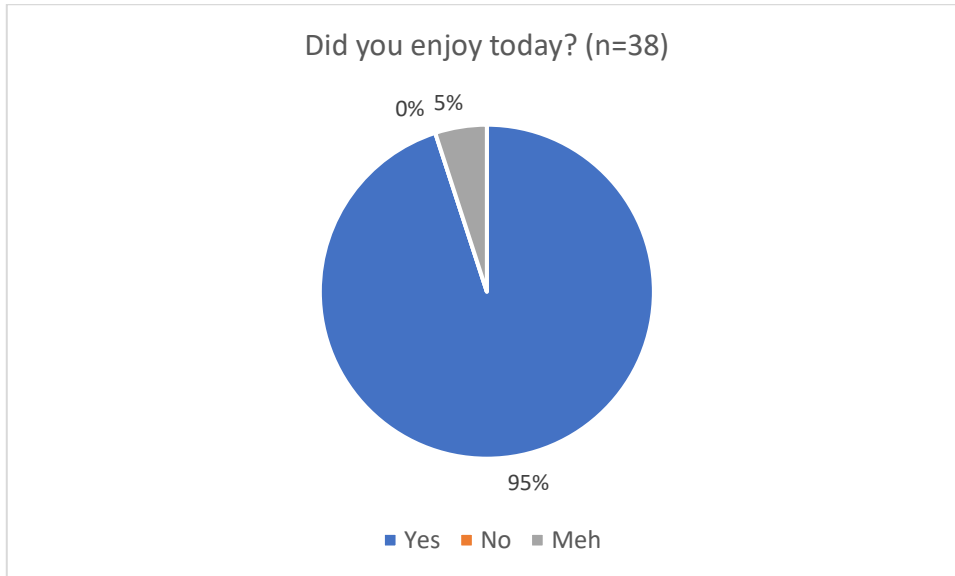
Desired outcomes



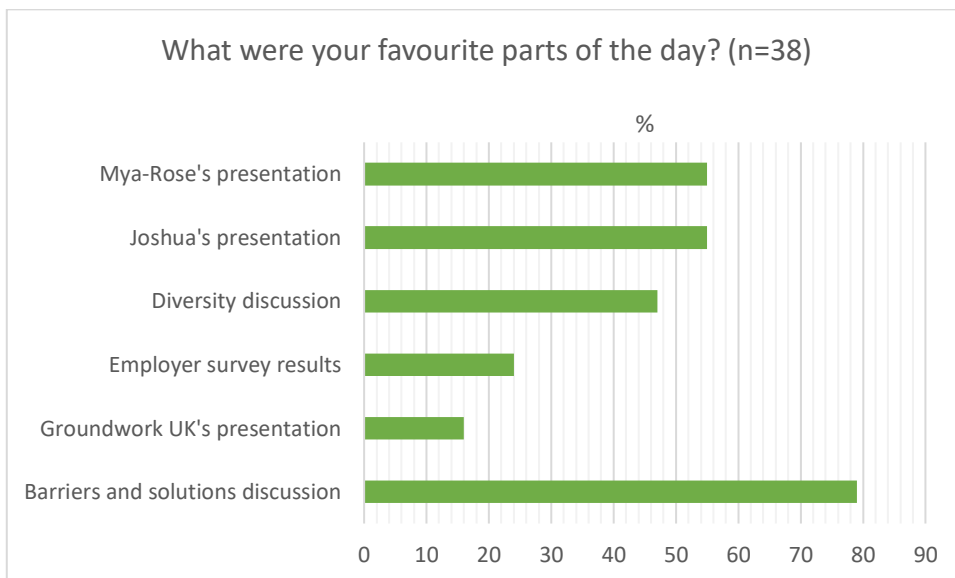
Each person could choose multiple response options for this question. There was a range of topics that attendees wished to understand better from the conference, with particular interest in what young people can do to overcome the barriers they face entering the environmental sector.

End poll results

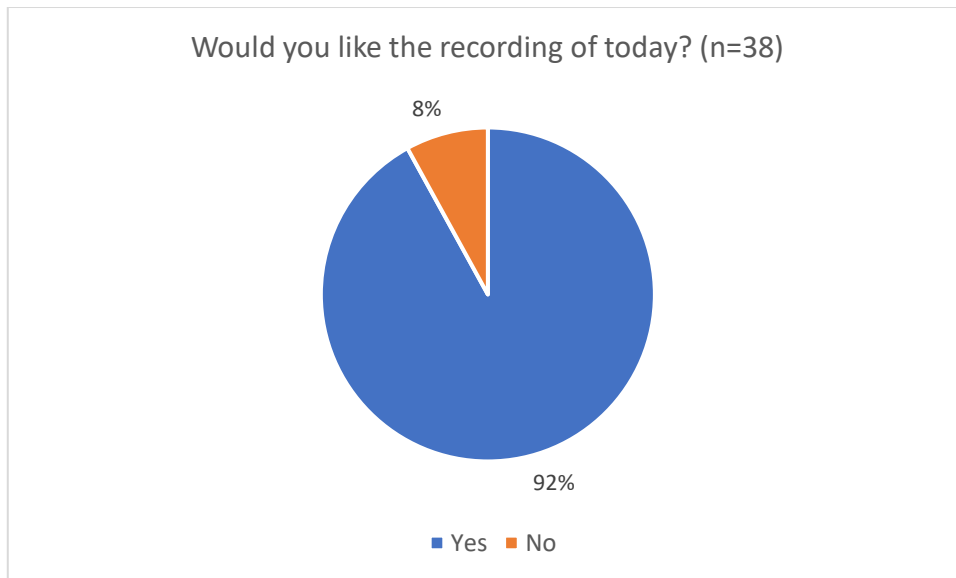
Enjoyment



Only two ‘meh’s out of 38 suggested that the conference was reasonably enjoyable!

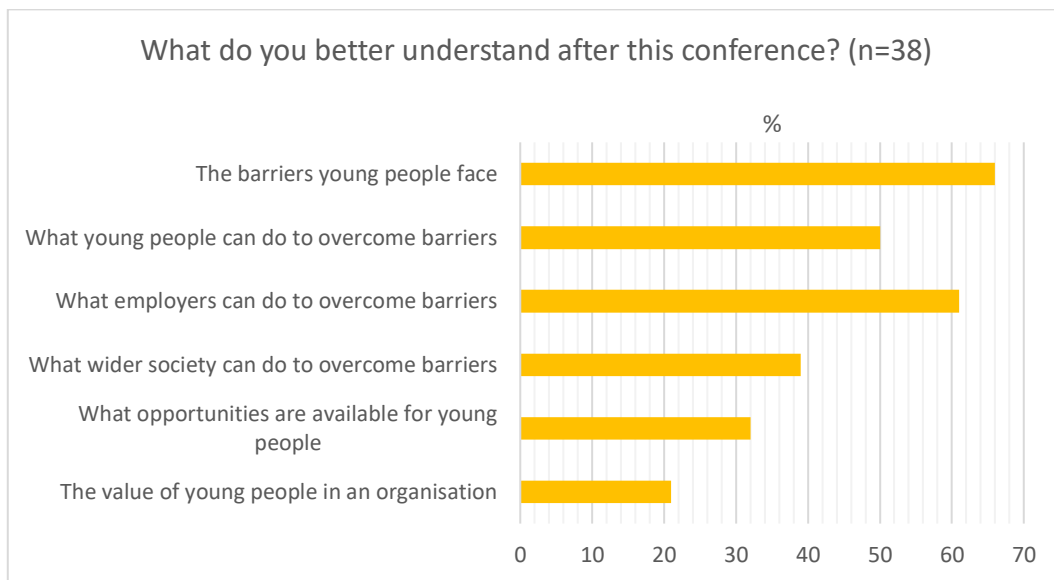


These results show the value of having interactive elements in an online conference: the barriers and solutions discussion was the most popular part of the conference. Moreover, the power of young voices was suggested by the high popularity of Mya-Rose’s and Joshua’s presentations.



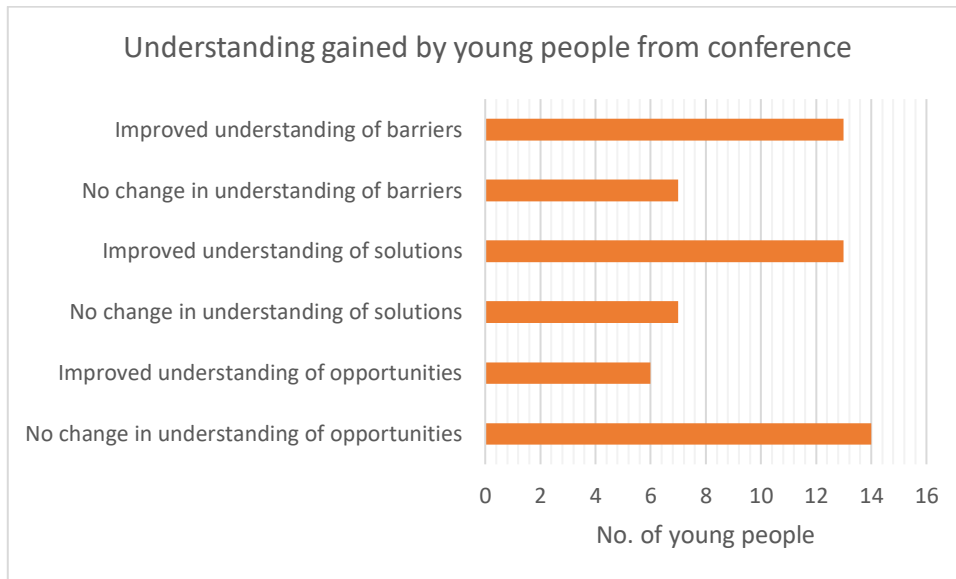
There appeared to be substantial interest in receiving the recording, suggesting most of the audience felt engaged and wanted to reinforce their learning from the conference.

Understanding gained



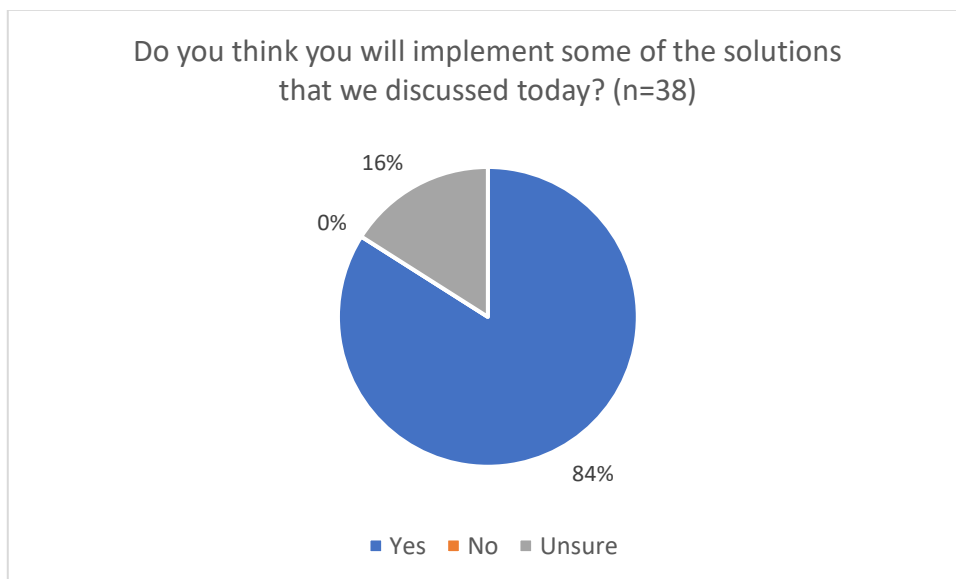
Each person could choose multiple response options for this question. In hindsight, the response options could have better matched those in the start poll, although comparison with the start poll is made trickier in any case by the drop-off in attendees since the start of the conference. These results suggest that many attendees were not previously aware of all the barriers faced by young people entering the environmental sector. It appears that percentages broadly match those in the start poll that have the same response option, which could suggest most people gained the understanding they wanted. There could have possibly been more of a focus on what young people can do to overcome barriers, as 50% of participants stated that they better understood this topic after the conference whereas c. 58% stated a desire to understand this better before the conference.

To assess whether outcomes 2 and 3 had been achieved (see 'Introduction'), we looked at response data of young people specifically (i.e. 16- to 24-year-olds) in relation to how their understanding had changed of the barriers young people face when entering the environmental sector, solutions to these barriers, and what opportunities exist for young people in ESOs:

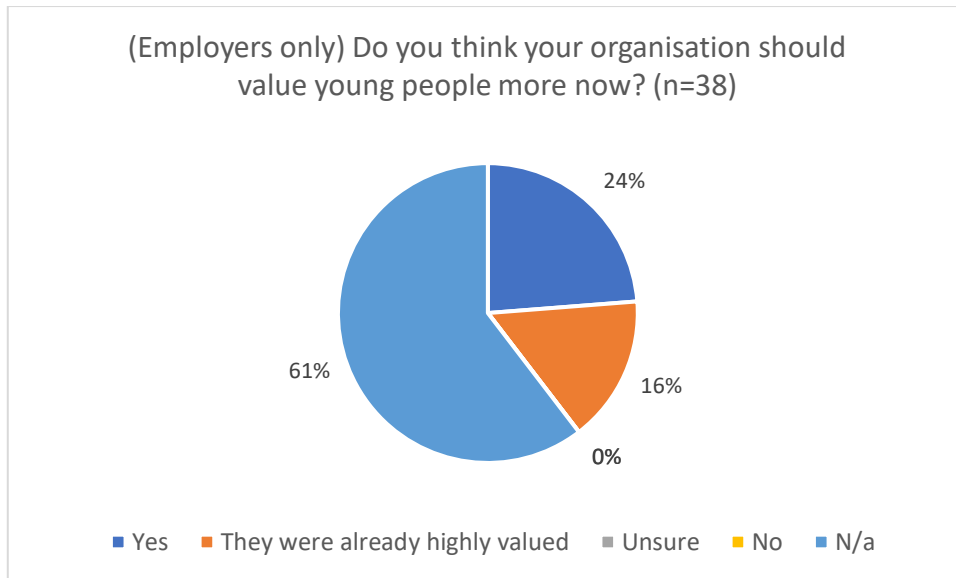


From these results we can claim to have achieved outcomes 2 and 3 for if not all then at least some of the young people attending the conference. The range of opportunities available for young people in the environmental sector could have been more clearly communicated.

Other legacy



It was encouraging that the strong majority of attendees were keen to implement some of the solutions discussed. For those who were unsure, the follow-up resources listing possible solutions may have been especially beneficial.



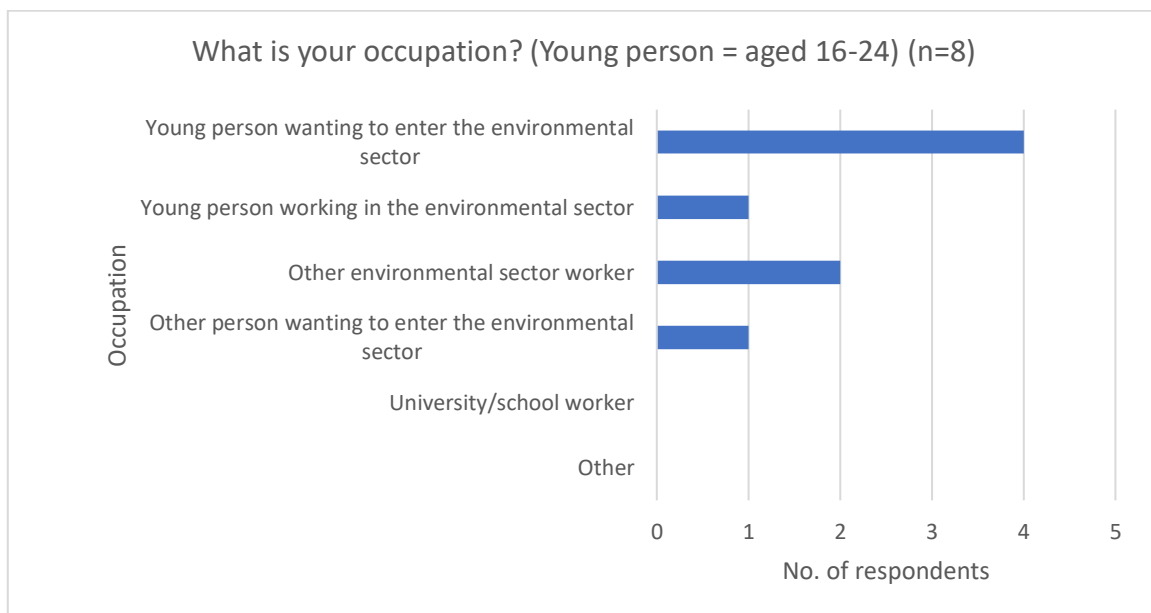
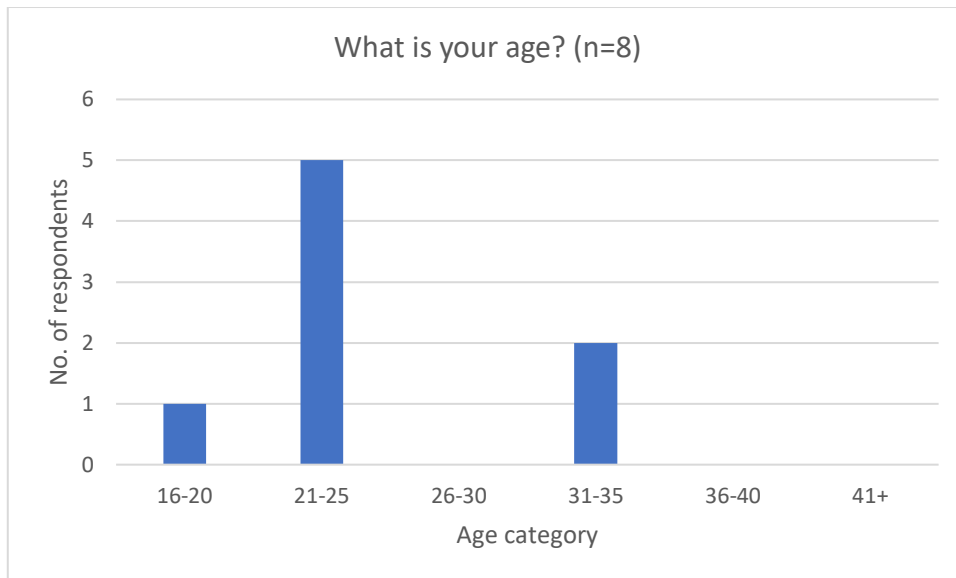
It was also encouraging that all ESOs that did not already value young people highly thought that they should value young people more highly following the conference, suggesting that they had gained a sense during the conference of the benefits that young people could bring to their organisation and the importance of supporting the next generation of environmentalists. This suggests outcome 1 was achieved (see 'Introduction'). Note that the 'N/a' responses were from audience members who were not young people.

Post-conference feedback

Sample size

Eight conference attendees responded to the follow-up survey. Although a small proportion of the attendees, some useful results were nonetheless gained.

Sample characteristics



The sample in the feedback survey included predominantly younger people wanting to enter the environmental sector. Young people may have had more time for completing the survey than older people working in the sector. Note that responses may be biased towards those who were more engaged by the conference and therefore more likely to give positive responses to the questions asked.

We asked attendees: ‘Do you consider yourself to be from an under-represented/disadvantaged background, especially in relation to the environmental sector? E.g. consider ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and disabilities. If so, and you are happy to, please list your status in the relevant categories.’ Two respondents identified as such:

“Perhaps. I would say there are few queer people or people on the spectrum but I had always put that down to rural location...”

“Yes - it is tough for working class families to access the large amount of volunteer experience needed to be successful in an environmental career (although I am very fortunate to have acquired the experience I have)”.

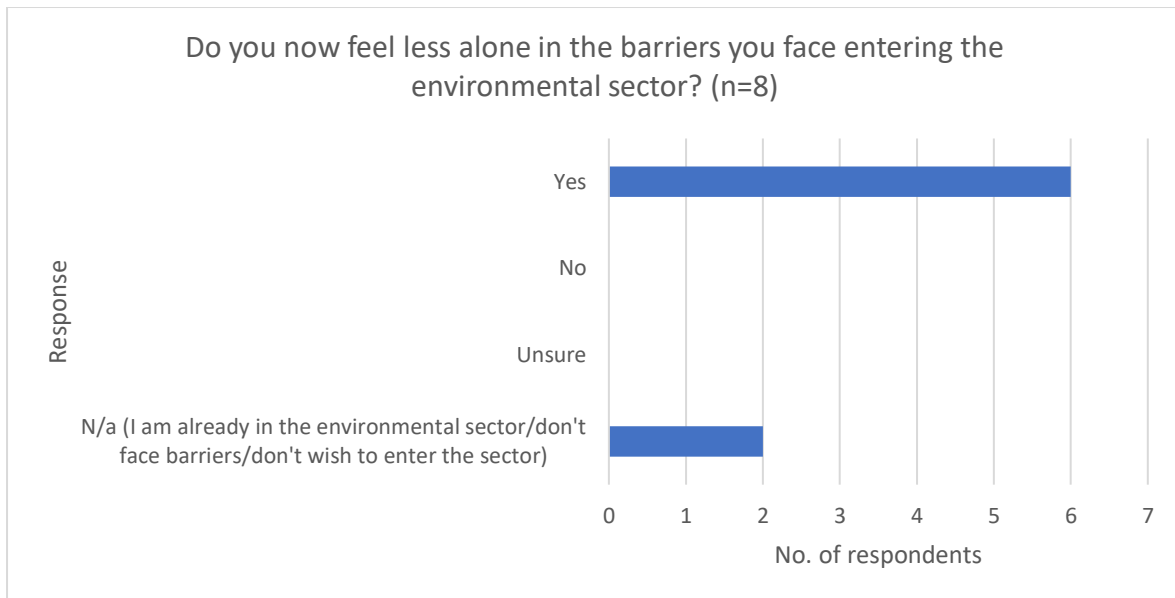
We are glad to have been able to engage with people from these backgrounds.

Understanding gained

	NO CHANGE	KNOWLEDGE SOMEWHAT IMPROVED	KNOWLEDGE GREATLY IMPROVED	TOTAL
The value of having young people in the environmental sector	37.50% 3	50.00% 4	12.50% 1	8
Problems of diversity within the environmental sector	12.50% 1	37.50% 3	50.00% 4	8
Other barriers that young people face when entering the environmental sector	25.00% 2	37.50% 3	37.50% 3	8
Solutions for young people wanting to enter the environmental sector	12.50% 1	62.50% 5	25.00% 2	8
Solutions for people from under-represented backgrounds wanting to enter the environmental sector	25.00% 2	25.00% 2	50.00% 4	8
What organisations can do to develop a more diverse workforce	25.00% 2	37.50% 3	37.50% 3	8
What organisations can do to overcome other barriers young people face when entering the environmental sector	25.00% 2	50.00% 4	25.00% 2	8
What wider society can do to overcome diversity issues and other barriers for young people entering the environmental sector	37.50% 3	25.00% 2	37.50% 3	8

Numbers and percentages refer to respondents. This question was not hugely useful due to the small sample size. Nonetheless, the greatest improvements in knowledge appeared to be for problems of diversity within the environmental sector and solutions for people from under-represented backgrounds wanting to enter the sector, suggesting that these topics from the conference may have been particularly valuable to discuss.

Other legacy



It was pleasing that all respondents for which this question was relevant now felt less alone in the barriers they faced. This shows that we achieved outcome 5 (see 'Introduction') for at least some of the young people in the conference.

We also asked attendees: 'What, if anything, would you now like to do in your career development or organisation to implement solutions suggested in the conference?' The responses are provided in the table below.

Join a youth advisory panel.
Learn to drive!
Consider how we might implement practices that better support our diversity and equality policies/commitment.
Networking and making connections.
We have a very clear idea of the barriers that are faced by young people entering the sector as well as the lack of diversity but the solutions to tackle this are still very vague so we need to do some more work on exploring possible solutions/changes that we can make.
I am not at present in a position to implement a solution.
Start a campaign to find alternatives to unpaid internships.
As a young person still trying to enter the conservation sector, I will continue volunteering wherever I can to try and network, thus hopefully leading to more job opportunities.

It is hoped that the Bridging the Gap cards will help provide inspiration for those who are currently struggling to find solutions.

We also asked attendees: ‘If your organisation has a partnership with e.g. a university/college/school/youth group, what advice would you give other organisations wishing to establish these sorts of partnerships? (Leave blank if this question does not apply to you)’. Only one (albeit useful) response was received: “Keep searching until you find that one individual within an organisation with a passion for the environment/ecology and build a relationship with them (they're not easy to find!)”.

Critique of conference

We asked attendees: ‘Do you have any suggested improvements to the conference?’ The responses are provided in the table below.

Response	Discussion
Some of it didn't feel universally relevant, or at least not to those from other areas of the UK. But that was also okay, it can't necessarily suit everyone all of the time, the information still had to come across in some way!	It's not entirely clear what 'other areas of the UK' refers to, but there may have been the feel of a Yorkshire or at least northern bias to the conference.
The 20-minute limit [in breakout rooms] cut the discussion short.	This suggests that an engaging discussion was being had and that if the time was available, breakout room discussions could have potentially been even longer. Breakout room facilitators should have been keeping an eye on the minute-long countdown sent by the meeting host to avoid the discussion being cut off suddenly.
Breakout sessions for organisations/employers to discuss and share ideas/successes on improving diversity and removing barriers to entering the sector - a chance to share 'best practice'?	This is a great idea. It would be an interesting exercise in a future conference to segregate the breakout rooms a bit more so that all ESO representatives have a discussion amongst each other (including sharing best practice), all young people have a discussion amongst each other, etc., before feeding back to the whole group.
None, very well done.	Thanks!

Finally, we asked attendees: ‘Do you have any other comments about the conference?’ We gave attendees the option of providing their name and occupation/organisation/job title if they were happy to. Responses are provided in the table below.

I really liked hearing from the two speakers. They were our age and had both come from difficult backgrounds and had still made it. But their stories weren't those miraculous one-offs that you hear about in the news that make you think "well that will never be me anyway because of this or that"; instead they were quite relatable.
Well-organised and well-facilitated event, thank you and well done!

The TNL conference was very well executed and I have learned a great deal from it. (Dan, volunteer, Scottish Wildlife Trust)

The hosts were really professional and they managed to make an online conference engaging and interactive.

I really enjoyed the format with the breakout rooms allowing for discussion. As there was a range of people in my group (students, young people like myself hoping to enter conservation, and people already in conservation) it was great to see the different views on barriers and also solutions.