

Citizenship activities linked to World Environment Day

Teachers' notes

Tutors and teachers working with young people aged 16–19 are often looking for activities which are both current and promote active citizenship. These materials focus on World Environment Day and comprise a general activity about what action the organisation (school, college, students' union, training provider, youth group) could take to support the day in future. This is followed by a classroom activity to raise awareness, stimulate discussion and promote social and political understanding. Activities are linked to the QCA post-16 citizenship learning objectives (Play your Part, 2004).

World Environment Day (WED) was established in 1972 by the United Nations General Assembly (www.unep.org/wed/2009/english/). It is the key means by which the UN stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political action. The theme of the WED 2009 was 'Your Planet Needs You – UNite to Combat Climate Change'.

The first activity involves making a pledge to take some individual action to reduce your carbon footprint followed by an investigation to find out more and then to hold a 'fair' to persuade others to sign the 'pledge'.

The second activity asks learners to consider the direct action favoured by environmental pressure groups such as Plane Stupid.

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Activity 1: The pledge

'Think global, act local' has long been a mantra for environmentalists. In this activity learners are invited to make a personal pledge to change some aspect of their behaviour to reduce their carbon footprint. The pledges are to make the change for a specific period of time rather than indefinitely on the assumption that people are more willing to make such limited commitments. In itself this act is not active citizenship. However, the overall aim of the activity is for learners to work in groups to persuade fellow learners and staff to make a similar pledge armed with the knowledge gained from further investigations into the issue. It is this act of persuading others that constitutes 'active citizenship'. It is an activity based on trust and there is no recommendation to 'police' the pledges in any way. Learners can calculate their own, or their family's, carbon footprint first by visiting a site such as <http://actonco2.direct.gov.uk/index.html>.

QCA post-16 learning objectives

- Discuss and debate citizenship issues
- Express and justify a personal opinion to others
- Exercise responsible action towards and on behalf of others.

Running the activity

Distribute the sheet with the list of pledges and ask learners to make a commitment to one pledge with an alternative option. It must be something that they are in a position to do. They can create their own pledge if they can think of another concrete idea to reduce their carbon footprint.

- Once individuals have made a choice, chart the choices and ask learners to form groups of two/three for the next stage of the activity.
- It is best if learners work in groups of two or three to support each other. They need to research the issue connected with the pledge by visiting The Big Green Switch website: www.biggreenswitch.co.uk/
- They should prepare their arguments and some kind of eye-catching visual display.
- On an agreed date, the learners can station themselves in a public space where fellow learners and staff pass. They should have a stall with the pledge clearly labelled and other visual/written information that they want to display.
- The group should agree on a target number of people to persuade to sign the pledge (for example 10 people).
- The groups should create a signing-up sheet for people to make the pledge.

Activity 1: List of pledges learners' sheet

Consider the following environmental pledges you can make to help reduce your carbon footprint as a contribution to World Environment Day (WED). Decide which pledge you would like to commit to. You should then join with one or two others making the same pledge to work together. You will then need to research the issues behind the pledge and prepare a display for WED when you will ask other people to sign the pledge.

The best website for investigating these pledges is The Big Green Switch – www.biggreenswitch.co.uk.

Pledge	Print name and signature
I will use public transport, walk or cycle rather than using a car (my own or others) to come here for five days	
I will agree to form a car pool to get here with at least one other driver for two weeks	
I will buy energy-efficient light bulbs for my room at home	
I check that my home PC and CD player and TV/DVD are not left on standby for a month	
I agree to use a carbon calculator to work out my carbon footprint	
I agree to make sure that my household buys products in season and locally produced vegetables for one month	
I agree to make sure my household switches to taking reusable bags when shopping and refuses plastic bags	
I agree to substitute at least one walk/cycle for a car journey every week for a month.	
Create your own pledge	

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Activity 2: Direct action

This activity asks learners to consider a series of actions taken by the anti-airport expansion pressure group, Plane Stupid. The basic demands of Plane Stupid are:

- the scrapping of airport expansion plans
- a tax on aircraft fuel and plane tickets
- an end to unnecessary and unsustainable short-haul flights.

The purpose of the activity is not to necessarily endorse or condemn the activities of Plane Stupid, but to consider the legitimate boundaries of pressure group activities in a democracy.

The questions learners should discuss are the same for each action:

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

The examples are all taken from the Plane Stupid website (www.planestupid.com/actions).

QCA post-16 citizenship learning objectives:

- Consider the social, moral and ethical issues applying to a particular situation
- Discuss and debate citizenship issues.

Running the activity

- Copy the two Direct action sheets, enough for one per group. Ask learners to work in groups of four or five. They should discuss the three questions relating to each action.
- Plane Stupid is a UK pressure group that exists to counteract climate change through taking action to fight against airport expansion. Its strap line is 'bringing the aviation industry down to earth'.
- Debrief by asking groups:
 - *Which do you think were the most effective actions for winning publicity? Why?*
 - *Which actions do you think were not fair, just, responsible or legal?*
 - *Who would feel comfortable carrying out similar actions?*

Activity 2 – Direct Action learners’ sheet 1

Direct Action 1

The action was throwing some ‘green custard’ over a cabinet minister who was involved in the decision to build a third runway at Heathrow Airport.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Direct Action 2

The action involved setting up a mini-golf course on the area where planes taxi at Aberdeen airport. The protestors surrounded themselves with fortified security fencing to make it more difficult for them to be removed.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Direct Action 3

The action involved a number of activists chaining themselves to the fence and putting up tents at the entrance to Southampton airport, turning it into a climate change refugee camp.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Direct Action 4

The action involved interrupting a public meeting at which the Minister for Energy and Climate Change was speaking. A banner accusing the government of ‘hypocrisy, government by hypocrites’ was unfurled behind the Minister.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Direct Action 5

The action involved activists dressed as information points (‘Can I hinder’ rather than ‘Can I help’) targeting people at Gatwick Airport. They handed out information on the ecological cost of aviation and the irresponsibility of people who fly short-haul.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Direct Action 6

An activist who was receiving an award from the Prime Minister at Downing Street put his super-glued hand on to the PM’s suit so he had to listen to the protest or take off his jacket.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Activity 2 – Direct Action learners’ sheet 2

Direct Action 7

The action involved placing a giant inflatable elephant outside a conference for people in the transport industry. A banner on the ‘animal’ said ‘Aviation is the elephant in the room’.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Direct Action 8

The action involved protesters climbing on to the roof of the Houses of Parliament and hanging banners. They also made paper aeroplanes out of confidential government documents and glided them into the MP’s car park.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Direct Action 9

This action involved one activist who superglued herself to the glass doors of a company seen as promoting short-haul flights. This blocked staff from entering the offices.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*

Direct Action 10

This action involved 30 protestors dressed as penguins ‘reclaiming the ice’ on an ice rink at the Natural History Museum in London. The rink is sponsored by British Airways. The action aimed to point out the irony between an airline creating an ice rink in central London whilst its business was helping to melt the ice caps and destroying penguins’ habitat.

- *Would the action be effective in getting publicity?*
- *Is it fair, just, responsible and legal?*
- *Would you be comfortable in acting in this way for a cause you supported strongly?*