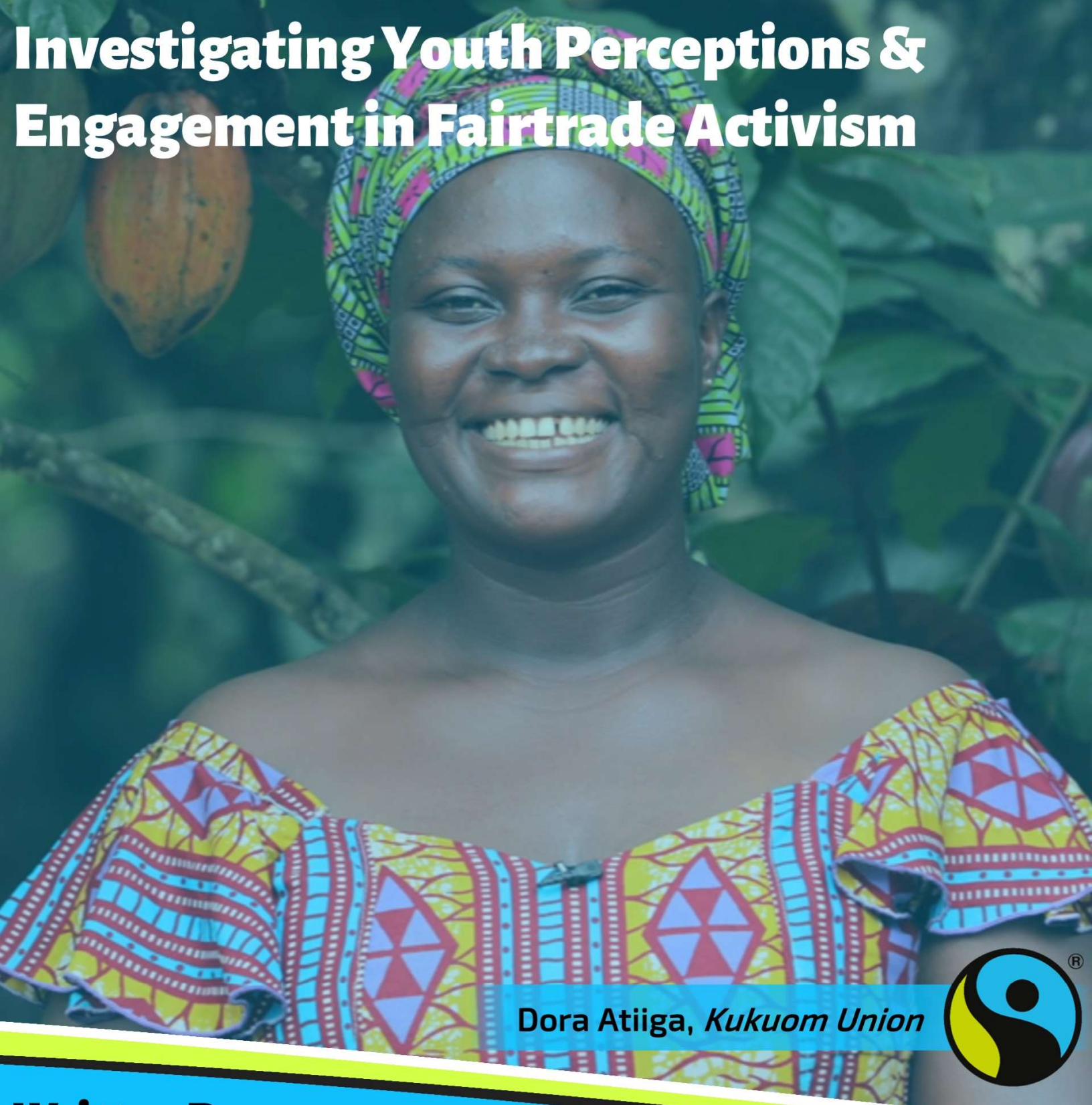


What's Fair?

Investigating Youth Perceptions & Engagement in Fairtrade Activism



Dora Atiiga, *Kukuom Union*



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What's Fair?
Investigating Youth Perceptions
& Engagement in Fairtrade Activism

An Interactive Qualifying Project
submitted to the Faculty of
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Bachelor of Science

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Date:
04 MAY 2026

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This report represents the work of the WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review. For more information about the projects program at WPI, see <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Projects>.

Abstract

Fairtrade is a non-profit organization and global certification system designed to promote fair wages, better working conditions, and more sustainable livelihoods for farmers and workers. In the United Kingdom, young people demonstrate high recognition of the Fairtrade brand, but limited engagement with the Fairtrade movement. Therefore, this project aims to develop recommendations for the Fairtrade Foundation to increase meaningful engagement among individuals aged 13 to 25. To better understand current perceptions and barriers to involvement for youth, extensive interviews and surveys were conducted. Many participants cited high costs, uncertainty about impact, and limited opportunities for involvement as significant barriers to their engagement with the organization. Time constraints further reduced participation as well. Based on these findings, this project proposes strategies emphasizing forms of engagement beyond public activism and experiential learning. These recommendations aim to support the Fairtrade Foundation in fostering sustained youth involvement in social and trade justice issues.

Acknowledgements

Our team would like to thank the following people for their unwavering support and contributions to this project:

To Elena Fernandez-Lee and Ailish White of the Fairtrade Foundation, for their timely commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm about their line of work which guided us throughout this project. Thank you for connecting our team with an extensive network of resources and the Fairtrade community.

To Katy Boom, Director of Sustainability, University of Worcester (UK), for her valuable connections and for her guidance at the Earth Day Event at the Hive. Our team greatly appreciates her effort and commitment in supporting us throughout our time here.

To our advisors, Professors Linda Looft and Althea Danielski, for their mentorship and instruction that supported us in producing our best work as a team.

To Professor Caitlin Neer, for their guidance during ID 2050.

To the Fairtrade educators and ambassadors: thank you for sharing your experience and expertise during our interview process.

To Peter Robinson, Vice Principal of Curriculum and Standards at the Heart of Worcestershire College, for kindly providing the opportunity to conduct data collection with the student body and teaching staff.

We have learned so much about Fairtrade and their mission to engage the youth community in the United Kingdom. We are grateful for this opportunity and the insight we have gained by completing this project.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Fairtrade is a nonprofit organization that serves as a global movement supporting farmers, connecting businesses and engaging with consumers by setting prices, investing in farming communities, and campaigning for global trade justice (Fairtrade, 2026). According to the Fairtrade UK Foundation, there has been a lack of engagement beyond ethical shopping among young people. Previous research performed for the Fairtrade Foundation concluded that shifting youth's focus onto ethical consumption helps to introduce to them to the fair trade movement, and that young people may become more engaged in Fairtrade through "experiential and collaborative learning opportunities" (E. Fernandez-Lee, personal communication, February 16, 2026), such as educational workshops. Fairtrade believes that young people's limited awareness of the organization's mission restricts meaningful engagement with Fairtrade beyond consumer choices. Accordingly, our project goal was to understand the current perception and barriers that prevent young people from engaging with Fairtrade's activist movement in order to encourage engagement in Fairtrade's broader mission beyond ethical shopping.

Background

To understand Fairtrade's organizational mission, vision, and programs, it is important to have a basic understanding of the concepts of global trade justice, as well as their impacts in least developed countries. Global trade systems are characterized by deep structural inequalities that shape how wealth, resources, and opportunities are distributed across nations and communities (Ó Laoghaire & Wells, 2022).

Within this context, social justice examines how marginalized populations are systematically disadvantaged in these systems, particularly in relation to labor conditions, access to resources, and economic opportunities. Trade justice expands upon these values by critiquing the global marketplace, where producers in low-income regions often receive disproportionately low compensation for the goods they produce, while wealthier nations take a majority of the value. Producers in economically disadvantaged nations frequently operate in supply chains

which limit their bargaining power, expose them to volatile markets, and restrict access to fair wages. This has resulted in increased scrutiny of trade justice and labor practices, prompting the rise of initiatives like Fairtrade, which seeks to promote more equitable compensation and sustainable economic relationships between producers and consumers (Fairtrade International, n.d.).

The Fairtrade Foundation is an international non-profit that has established an extensive global trade network built upon the Fairtrade principles of social and environmental justice. As part of the Fairtrade mission, the organization educates a wide demographic on the Fairtrade principles. Recently, Fairtrade has started to engage with an older youth audience, hoping for increased involvement with the organization.

Research shows that while many young people express concern for environmental and social justice issues, this concern does not always translate into action (Boulianne & Ohme, 2022). However, linking these issues to causes students already engage with can increase participation. Educational settings, particularly through interactive or simulation-based activities, offer valuable opportunities to deepen engagement (Moulton, 2024). At the University of Worcester, this is reflected in its long-standing Fairtrade accreditation and student-led sustainability initiatives to promote ethical labor practices.

Objectives and Methods

The goal of our project is to increase meaningful youth engagement (ages 13-25) with Fairtrade's broader mission beyond ethical shopping. To successfully achieve this goal, we have identified the following objectives:

1. Assess youth's current knowledge of Fairtrade

To achieve this objective, our team conducted surveys with the Heart of Worcestershire College, the University of Worcester, and secondary school students in England with the support of local educators. Participants were surveyed about their knowledge of their school's affiliation with Fairtrade, as well as their current engagement with the organization.

2. Identify and evaluate best practices for increasing participation in social justice activism among those aged 13-25

To achieve this objective, we investigated and documented how educators currently teach Fairtrade, and how they can improve their current practices. To do this, we used archival document analysis and interviews with Fairtrade educators. Interviewees were asked questions regarding how their everyday work is related to Fairtrade.

3. Develop strategies to increase and sustain youth's engagement with Fairtrade

To complete this objective, our team noted trends in the target demographic and formulated conclusions based upon the previous objectives. We analyzed the different methods and tools educators used to promote Fairtrade workshops and how they sustained participant engagement within them. We combined this with data gathered on engagement trends identified from the youth surveys to create strategies Fairtrade could use to increase youth engagement.

Results and Key Findings

Our primary survey population consisted of students from the University of Worcester and Heart of Worcestershire College, as well as some secondary school students, totaling 201 responses. Based on the results, we noted an important theme between the disparity of brand recognition, which was high as compared to the respondent's engagement with Fairtrade.

Around 70% of respondents noted that they had heard of Fairtrade before, and 87% of respondents correctly identified the Fairtrade logo. Out of the 70% who heard about Fairtrade, 97% of them correctly identified the Fairtrade logo. This shows that Fairtrade's brand recognition is high amongst our survey population.

When it comes to engaging with Fairtrade, the perceived method of engagement has been through buying the organization's products. 67% of respondents reported that they purchased a Fairtrade product in the past. However, when asked about barriers to buying Fairtrade products, 49% of respondents noted that lack of comprehensive knowledge about Fairtrade prevents them from buying Fairtrade. Beyond just buying Fairtrade, there was hesitation in activism engagement.

When it comes to engaging in activism, engagement is measured through the gap between belief and pursuing action. 70% of those surveyed believe that young people can make a difference in global issues. On the other hand, over 60% of respondents reported never engaging in activism, and another 27% only engage in activism occasionally. This shows that young people believe they can make a difference in global issues but don't regularly partake in activities that will help that cause.

To gain qualitative data on trends in youth engagement, our team conducted online interviews with six individuals with experience as Fairtrade educators, as well as one educator in an adjacent area of sustainability. The purpose of these interviews was to identify the best practices currently used to increase Fairtrade engagement among young people.

From the interviews, there were common themes that were noted among all interviewees. One theme we noted was that active and inquiry-based learning are considered to be two of the most engaging approaches for primary school students. Active learning, combined with inquiry-based learning, allows students to explore Fairtrade concepts more deeply through activities such as storytelling and interactive activities such as Fairtrade bake sales. Another theme that we discovered was the difficulty in engaging secondary students. Secondary students are often too occupied preparing for college exams that they lack time for many extracurriculars. Despite this, competitions, such as baking competitions or Dragons' Den style sales pitches, were found to be effective ways to connect with and engage these students. At the university level, students were most engaged with Fairtrade if the activities were student-led, as it gave them a sense of ownership over the organization's mission. This engagement in student-led initiatives can be seen through the success of the Fairtrade ambassador and auditor, voluntary roles students can accept to assist the organization. Beyond this, many interviewees noted that participation with Fairtrade at the university level occurs in waves. There may be a group of highly motivated students that work with Fairtrade for years, but when they graduate, they leave nobody behind to continue their work. This makes it incredibly difficult to sustain long-term engagement.

Through studying our survey data and the trends we found from our interviews and archival research, we proposed a series of short and long-term recommendations to increase young people's engagement with Fairtrade.

Short-Term Recommendations

Based on our findings, the following short-term recommendations were made so strategies to increase youth engagement with Fairtrade could begin immediately:

1. **Create a resource to help establish standardized Fairtrade societies:** our team created a prototype handbook that can be used to attract new members and guide them in creating their own Fairtrade groups.
2. **Reimagine the Fairtrade University Award:** to give universities a reason to achieve more than the minimum for accreditation through national recognition at the Fairtrade Symposium.
3. **Continue to encourage private activism:** so that busy students have an avenue to engage, even with minimal time.

Long-Term Recommendations

Along with our short-term recommendations, the following long-term recommendations were made to accommodate strategies to increase engagement that would take considerable time and resources to establish:

1. **Unite Fairtrade societies, communities, and other groups:** to ensure groups are working toward a common goal.
2. **Improve current social media strategies:** we suggest using a more flexible social media strategy that can keep up with rapidly changing trends as well as hiring student media interns to assist with engagement.
3. **Incentivize Fairtrade student involvement:** we suggest framing Fairtrade involvement as a way to gain professional skills. Through the use of titles and awards, students can feel a sense of ownership and connection with the organization as a way to better themselves.

These recommendations were made for Fairtrade UK to bridge the gap between awareness and action, providing practical pathways to transform recognition of Fairtrade into meaningful and sustained youth engagement.

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Camden is a BS/MS Robotics Engineering major from Plattsburgh, NY. For the project, he provided background research on social and trade justice globally and in LDCs, as well as potential barriers to youth engagement. Camden co-authored the background, results, and recommendations section. Additionally, he supported his team by editing the report, planning deliverables, and brainstorming during meetings.



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Alyssa is a third year BS/MS Aerospace Engineering student from Northport, NY. Throughout the report, Alyssa provided background research related to youth activism and barriers to youth engagement. Additionally, she supported the team on the design and formatting of the documents and finalizing editing within the report. Her largest contribution was the design and formatting of the final presentation.

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Braden is a third year Electrical and Computer Engineering major from Simsbury, CT. Braden set up and conducted interviews with Fairtrade educators. For the writing of this report, he focused on the background of university engagement, interview results, and recommendations. Braden had a great time in Worcester UK, and he enjoyed exploring the nature surrounding the city.

AI Use Statement

AI use within this report was limited to utilizing software such as ChatGPT and Gemini for possible word choice and grammar. On occasion, the programs were somewhat helpful, but any suggestions were further evaluated before being utilized in the report.

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1.0 Introduction

Global systems of production and trade are often presented as necessities for economic growth, yet their benefits are distributed unevenly. Marginalized producers and developing nations frequently face structural disadvantages, such as limited bargaining power, unstable wages, and restricted access to global markets. These disparities reflect broader issues of social injustice within international trade systems, where certain economic relationships reinforce existing inequalities, rather than alleviate them.

In response to these inequities, many initiatives and organizations have emerged to promote more equal forms of trade. In recent years many of these efforts have had something in common: interest in getting the younger generation involved. Young people are a particularly important demographic to engage in social justice and climate issues because of their energy and creativity in developing activist ideas (Arnot et al., 2025). However, many organizations have found that while youth may be well educated on social and environmental issues, they choose not to engage with activism due to lack of agency, efficacy, or belief in the cause (Watson et al., 2025).

One organization that has struggled to gain the engagement of young people is the Fairtrade Foundation in the United Kingdom. The Fairtrade Foundation maintains a sustainable supply chain from farmers to businesses and on to consumers through setting prices, investing in farming communities, and campaigning for working rights and trade justice (Fairtrade, 2026). Young people should be able to meaningfully engage with Fairtrade beyond consumer choices, but their limited awareness of Fairtrade's broader mission and barriers to participation restrict their sustained involvement. Our project aims to understand the current perceptions and barriers that prevent young people from engaging with Fairtrade's activist movement.

Previous research performed for the Fairtrade Foundation concluded that the focus on ethical consumption may lead to the concept of fair trade, and that young people may be better engaged in Fairtrade through "experiential and collaborative learning opportunities" (E. Fernandez-Lee, personal communication, February 16, 2026), such as their educational workshops. While these workshops appear to be successful in engaging university students in

peer-led sessions about trade injustice and root causes of sustainability issues (Smith et al., 2024), Fairtrade has not collected data on the long-term outcomes of these workshops.

Our project will use those prior studies and initiatives as a foundation for our research into youth engagement. The goal of this project is to increase meaningful youth engagement (ages 13-25) with Fairtrade's broader mission beyond ethical shopping. To achieve this goal, we laid out the following objectives:

1. Assess youth's current knowledge of Fairtrade
2. Identify and evaluate best practices for increasing participation in social justice activism among those aged 13-25
3. Develop strategies to increase and sustain youth's engagement with Fairtrade

2.0 Background

To understand Fairtrade's organizational mission, vision and programs, it is important to have a basic understanding of the concepts of social and climate justice, as well as their impacts in least developed countries. Along with these topics, in this section our team presents different perspectives on youth engagement in trade activism. We also provide a brief introduction to our sponsor, [Fairtrade UK](#), and its mission to promote social justice and sustainable practices. Additionally, we discuss factors contributing to youth engagement, specifically amongst students. We explore Fairtrade programs conducted by the [University of Worcester](#) and describe how they engage students in environmental and social justice activism along with the Fairtrade Movement. Lastly, our team will identify potential gaps in youth engagement and further plans of study.

2.1 Social and Trade Justice

Global trade systems are characterized by deep structural inequalities that shape how wealth, resources, and opportunities are distributed across nations and communities (Ó Laoghaire & Wells, 2022). Within this context, social justice examines how marginalized populations are systematically disadvantaged in these systems, particularly in relation to labor conditions, access to resources, and economic opportunities. Trade justice expands upon these values by critiquing the global marketplace, where producers in low-income regions often receive disproportionately low compensation for the goods they produce, while wealthier nations take a majority of the value. These disparities are especially evident in industries reliant on agricultural production and raw material exports. Producers in economically disadvantaged nations frequently operate in supply chains which limit their bargaining power, expose them to volatile markets, and restrict access to fair wages. As a result, many of these producers and their nations remain stuck in a cycle of poverty, despite their significant contributions to global production (Ó Laoghaire & Wells, 2022).

Climate change further exacerbates these structural inequalities (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). Communities already facing economic marginalization are disproportionately affected by

environmental disruptions, while wealthier nations are better equipped to adapt to such shocks. Factors such as political instability, inadequate infrastructure, and geographic vulnerability constrain the ability of disadvantaged nations to anticipate and respond to environmental disasters (Kennet, 2018). Consequently, extreme weather events can devastate already fragile economies, disrupting production and reinforcing existing patterns of inequality within global trade systems.

2.2 Trade Justice in Least Developed Countries

When investigating how global trade systems disadvantage vulnerable populations, it is imperative to examine Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The United Nations defines LDCs as “low-income countries suffering from the most severe structural impediments to sustainable development” (UN/DESA, 2021). More specifically, this classification is based on criteria such as a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of less than \$1,088 USD and a [Human Asset Index](#) (HAI) score below 60 points. This classification is crucial, as much of the academic and political discourse categorizes nations as either “developed” or “developing”, which obscures the true structural challenges LDCs face and reduces their complex development barriers to a generalized condition of poverty (Farias, 2019). To put the differences in perspective, the average GNI for non-LDCs is roughly \$13,000 USD and the average HAI for developing countries is 80 points (UN/DESA, 2021). In both metrics, LDCs fall far below average. These disparities are not incidental, but rather the result of historical marginalization, colonial legacies, and continued exclusion from equitable participation in global markets.

This inequality is further exacerbated by geographic concentration. Of all 43 recognized LDCs, 32 of them reside in sub-Saharan Africa, as seen in Figure 1 (UNCTAD, n.d.). Many of these countries rely heavily on the export of valuable commodities such as gold, tea, mangoes, and cashews. Despite global demand for these goods, LDCs often only receive a small share of their final value. Wealthier nations with multinational connections retain control of supply chains, pricing, processing, and distribution, allowing them to capture a majority of the profits.

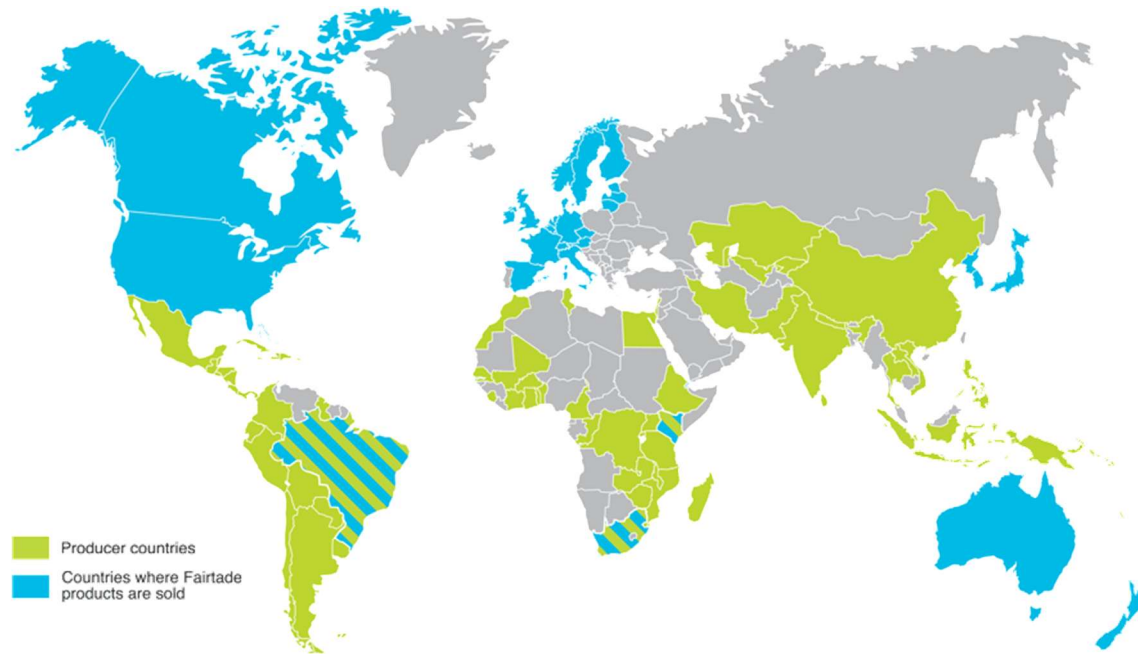
Figure 1: Map of the Least Developed Countries (highlighted in red)



Note. From What is a Least Developed Country, by UNCTAD, 2017, <https://unctad.org/press-material/ldc-what-least-developed-country>

As a result, widespread poverty persists in LDCs, with many individuals living on a budget of under one US dollar per day (Kennet, 2018). This reflects a broader pattern in which global trade systems undervalue low-income regions to extract economic value for wealthier economies (see Figure 2). This has resulted in increased scrutiny of trade justice and labor practice prompting the rise of initiatives like Fairtrade, which seeks to promote more equitable compensation and sustainable economic relationships between producers and consumers (Fairtrade International, n.d.).

Figure 2: Map of Producer Countries and Fairtrade-selling Countries



Note. From Fairtrade in the World, by Fairtrade Label South Africa, n.d., <https://fairtradelabel.org.za/whatis/fairtrade-in-the-world.6.html>

2.3 Youth and Engagement in Activism

Youth activism can create social, political, and environmental changes. Younger generations, specifically those who are too young to vote, can feel more influential through large-scale activism (Kowasch et al., 2021). This implies the large role that emotions play in terms of youth involvement in movements, especially those pertaining to social justice. There is a strong correlation between young people showing environmental, social, and ethical concerns and participation in activism such as boycotts (Boulianne & Ohme, 2022). Additionally, according to Boulianne and Ohme (2022), those who feel as if their actions have a positive political impact are more inclined to participate; this almost doubles their likelihood of participation. In general, participation in activism allows young people to feel a sense of agency and allows them to express their political concerns.

According to past research, many young people show concern for the environment and social justice, although this does not always lead to action (Boulianne & Ohme, 2022). Encouraging young people to engage in activism can be difficult; however, Boulianne and Ohme (2022) claim that there is a correlation among those between the ages of 18-33 utilizing social media and their participation in activism. Those who follow accounts that promote environmental activism have almost three times higher odds of participating in activities such as marches, demonstrations, boycotts, and signing petitions (Boulianne & Ohme, 2022).

Activism does not have to involve these large-scale demonstrations, however. Instead, many young people choose to engage in “private activism” (Hockey, 2025). In lieu of large-scale protests and movements, private activism involves a change in personal lifestyle. In terms of the environment, these can be intentional choices that promote sustainability in one’s daily life. It is important to note that there are some concerns with the ease of making these lifestyle changes. Survey evidence from Hockey (2025), suggests that some young people are skeptical of how products are marketed. Young people suspect that products marketed as sustainable may be capitalizing on the green movements and not actually be as sustainable as advertised. This type of marketing, known as “greenwashing”, may affect youth participation in these lifestyle changes.

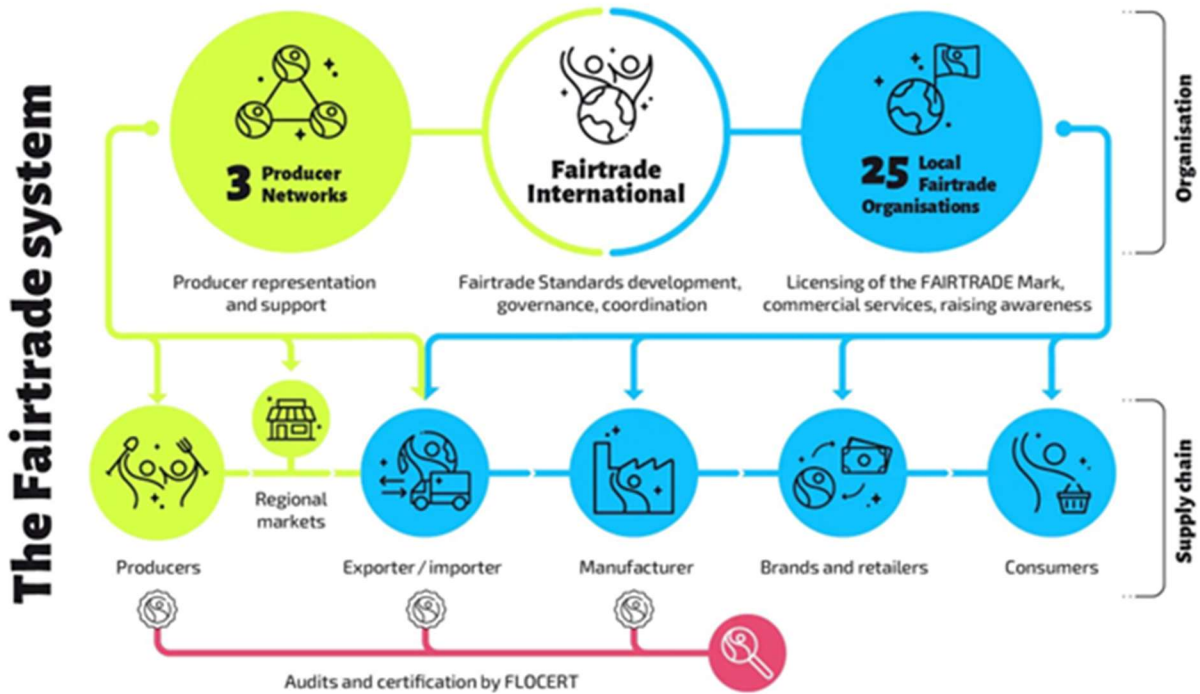
Successful activist movements require a combination of digital and in-person connections to create necessary engagement in consumer activism (Discetti & Anderson, 2023). Online groups are a popular method to initiate engagement with the cause. These groups are used to create personal bonds between members and allow them to create a collective identity. However, a sustainable movement requires physical meetings between stakeholders in the group (Hoelscher & Chatzidakis, 2021). In other words, stakeholders may use the groups to identify others who engage in the same issues, but online connections often translate into in-person events where individuals meet and develop their ideas and relationships further. In the United Kingdom one such popular event is the Fairtrade Fortnight, where people come together for a two-week event, with various conferences and fairs hosted to promote awareness of sustainable practices and ethically sourced products (Fairtrade, n.d.).

2.4 Mission and Purpose of Fairtrade

Fairtrade is an internationally recognized organization established to address social inequality and trade justice issues faced by small-scale producers in the global economic system. The origins of the Fairtrade movement can be traced back to pioneers from the mid-1900s, such as Edna Ruth Byler, who advocated fair textile pricing for marginalized workers. Her early efforts for economic and social justice laid the foundation for the Fairtrade mission. Today, Fairtrade's mission has evolved to “empower farmers and workers around the world to enable sustainable development for themselves and their communities” (Fair Trade USA, 2026). By advocating for fair compensation, equitable working conditions, and promotion of sustainable practices, Fairtrade aims to establish a sustainability-based framework in the global trade network.

Since the conception of the movement, the Fairtrade mission has grown from a concept into an international non-profit organization. The Fairtrade organization operates through a multilayered organizational structure that connects producer networks, certifiers, and global markets (Fairtrade, 2026). Fairtrade International is a global non-profit with 25 member organizations under its influence, such as Fairtrade UK and Fairtrade US. Fairtrade International is primarily in charge of creating the Fairtrade standards and management of the member organizations. Member organizations are responsible for promoting Fairtrade products and ideology in their specified region. Through activist efforts, Fairtrade has built three regional networks of producers across the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America that aggregate 1,930 smaller organizations of farmers and workers. Validation of Fairtrade standards is overseen by [FLOCERT](#), which is the independent certifier of the Fairtrade standard. A visual representation of the Fairtrade organization is detailed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Chart of Fairtrade Organization Structure



Note. From How Fairtrade works, by Fairtrade Foundation, 2026, <https://www.fairtrade.net/uk-en/why-fairtrade/what-we-do/how-fairtrade-works.html>

Beyond certifications, Fairtrade is heavily involved in promoting awareness of their mission. Fairtrade’s primary method of engagement comes through featuring stories of local producers around the globe in Fairtrade content, through social media posts, public presentations, and workshops. In addition to global engagement, the organization advocates for legislative change regarding sustainable trade practices. Member organizations have conducted workshops in various schools and universities, promoted awareness of the Fairtrade mission, and engaged in a wider demographic within youth communities.

2.5 Engaging Secondary School Students

Fairtrade believes secondary school student participation is crucial to the success of their movement (E. Fernandez-Lee, personal communication, February 16, 2026). During secondary school, many students begin to form their own sense of agency and responsibility (NIH, 2018). It is during this time in school that attitudes, opinions, and habits are formed that influence many students for the rest of their life. Therefore, the [World Health Organization](#) suggests that if a campaign can make an impression on students in this age range, 13-18 years, they may be more willing to engage with similar activities in the future (WHO, n.d). However, making an actual impression on secondary school students comes with many challenges. One crucial challenge is that secondary school drives early academic specialization, which results in lack of time and energy for other activities (GOV.UK, n.d).

Secondary school does not just mark a time for personal growth and learning; it marks the start of when students need to begin preparing for university. In the UK, acceptance into university is almost entirely based on academic performance, requiring certain scores on one's GCSEs and A-Levels to be considered for university programs (GOV.UK, n.d). Students begin to prepare for these tests from the time they enter secondary school. Given that each student's ability to get into university is based almost entirely upon these tests, schools do not encourage students' time to be spent on activities other than studying. Therefore, organizations such as Fairtrade have a hard time engaging and retaining secondary school students through extracurriculars like workshops, clubs, and other societies as there is so much for these students to focus on in their preparation for higher education (E. Fernandez-Lee, personal communication, February 16, 2026).

2.6 Engaging University Students

One key to an enduring activist campaign is the engagement of university students. Studies have reached different conclusions regarding the necessary conditions for engaging college students. In his study of a Thai university, Piyapong (2020) defines "pro-environmental behaviors" as activist, nonactivist, or private green sphere behaviors which are based upon the

environmental knowledge, environmental attitude, and personal or moral responsibility of the students to the environment. Using this framework, Piyapong (2020) concluded that college students who engage in activism tend to possess environmental knowledge and a sense of obligation to the environment. However, in their survey of college students from three countries, Chuvieco et al. (2018) found that college students with increased knowledge of environmental problems do not necessarily have increased engagement with solving the problems. Based on the findings from these studies, increased engagement of college students in activism requires personal experience with the issues, and/or personal commitment to face the issues.

Piyapong (2020) also suggests that environmental knowledge should be taught from multiple perspectives to show students how environmental issues connect to social, economic, and political conditions. By connecting environmental issues to causes that the students already engage in, the students are more likely to engage in the environmental cause. The classroom is an example of one setting where simulation activities can educate and engage students with environmental activism (Moulton, 2024). Simulations allow students to debate environmental topics and deepen their understanding of environmental organizations. The simulation works especially well with students in environmental or adjacent fields. These findings suggest that student engagement increases when students feel a personal connection and obligation to the environment; the effectiveness of these strategies depends on their implementation in real institutional settings. The University of Worcester exemplifies this approach by implementing student-led initiatives to engage in environmentally based learning. One example would be a student-led podcast where they discuss making small changes to their lifestyles to become more sustainable together.

2.7 University of Worcester's Student Involvement with Sustainability

The University of Worcester aims to ensure that students are knowledgeable about environmental studies and policies. It is ranked in the top ten for most sustainable institutions in the UK (University of Worcester, n.d). Katy Boom, the Director of Sustainability, designs the

University's initiatives and community involvement to align with the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#) vision statement. The University's sustainability program advocates for "Change Today, Protect Tomorrow," calling out an opportunity for students and faculty on campus to play a part in contributing to social justice activism. Since 2019, the University's annual sustainability report has been a [Green Gown winner](#) signifying exceptional sustainability projects in UK colleges. This award for Sustainability Institution of the Year was awarded by the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges.

Notably, many Worcester students are heavily involved in project research, volunteering, and employment for the Sustainability Department (University of Worcester, n.d). The Green Impact Program at the University works with students, staff, and external organizations to encourage and reward sustainability improvements and initiatives. Currently, there are twenty students employed in this program (K. Boom, personal communication, February 2, 2026). They host events for Go Green Week, a week filled with fun and engaging activities to raise awareness of sustainable living (University of Worcester, n.d). These projects help build awareness about the climate crisis and educate students about what they could do to make campus life more eco-friendly.

Further, the University of Worcester has been Fairtrade accredited since 2008 and keeps the accreditation with ongoing sustainability projects developed in collaboration with students (P. Kitchener, personal communication, February 2, 2026). The partnership between Fairtrade and the University of Worcester requires work on collaborative projects within the student-led community. One example is that all footballs used by the Student Union and sport programs are Fairtrade certified to support ethical labor practices. All catering vendors are required to sell as many Fairtrade products as possible in cafes, dining rooms, shops, vending and other outlets (University of Worcester, n.d.). At professional meetings and hospitality events, Fairtrade tea and coffee are always served to increase the range of Fairtrade products being used (University of Worcester, n.d.). With these practices, the university achieved a 2-star rating in 2025 that was delivered in collaboration with the Fairtrade Foundation and Students Organizing for Sustainability. (University of Worcester, n.d). This award highlighted the university's dedication to supporting farmers and workers and promoting global trade ethics to students and staff. The

goal by the end of 2026 is for the university to reach three stars in the [Fairtrade enterprise](#), which is the highest level that can be attained for this award.

The University of Worcester has created successful methods to engage students in sustainability education by providing employment opportunities, projects, interactive websites, and even cross-cultural projects (e.g. the [Worcester Polytechnic Institute](#) 3rd year student collaboration). Further, the University of Worcester has developed a strong connection with Fairtrade, which has helped maintain student involvement. However, there are still many young people, not just at the University of Worcester, but around the globe, who are not engaging in sustainable practices crucial to Fairtrade's mission. The lack of youth engagement can stem from a multitude of sources.

2.8 Why Are Young People Not Engaging?

Young consumers must have a source of motivation to purchase ethically sourced products. The main motivation for purchasing Fairtrade products is aligned with economic concepts such as willingness to pay, income gaps, and environmental/sustainability concerns (Robichaud & Yu, 2022). Many young consumers do not understand the high costs necessary to meet Fairtrade standards, nor the concept of the Fairtrade premium. In 2019, a retail and sustainability survey determined that fifty percent of Gen-Z participants stated they were willing to pay more for a sustainable product when making purchasing decisions. However, this correlates to higher income, education level, and social status within young consumers who regularly purchase Fairtrade products. In the United Kingdom, the green packaging (labelled organic or fair trade) increases the price of the coffee by more than 11%. For young people with lower incomes the higher price of ethical shopping brands disincentivizes activism. Some actions, such as “buycotting” (the act of buying a product because it is good or sustainable) may have a lesser impact on the supporting movements than other types of negative activism involvement such as boycotting or protests (Hockey, 2025). Buycotting, along with other forms of positive political consumerism, has been less effective at making a difference, possibly due to mistrust between young people and major brands. Brands can market themselves to be

sustainable, but some young consumers question if they really are. Undoubtedly, young people need to be motivated if they are to purchase Fairtrade products.

Young people can also be more inclined to get involved if they feel they can make a change (Kowasch et al., 2021). Educating individuals about the importance and necessity of their engagement can lead to a greater impact on how effective their participation is. If youth cannot see results from their activism, then young people may feel as though they should not bother even participating (Hockey, 2025). To address the disconnect, Fairtrade has been making efforts to connect with the youth by hosting interactive events to educate young people about their mission.

Fairtrade hosted workshops in 2023 at an international symposium event with secondary students. By participating in the workshops, young people realized that there had been no reinforced learning about Fairtrade since they moved into higher education. From the workshops, it was determined that a majority of students do not engage in sustainable education after completing primary school (Smith et al., 2024). Students actively participated in lectures and games involving Fairtrade bananas when they were in primary school. However, there has been no reinforcement about the Fairtrade organization after primary school. During a debate about the global climate and food crisis, secondary students were able to refresh their primary school knowledge about Fairtrade and engage with their fellow peers. Students interacted with farmers and Fairtrade employees, and this stimulated interest in the movement. However, there was no tool for evaluating the effectiveness of the workshop. This lack of assessment made it difficult to determine whether educational initiatives either motivated long-term interest in engagement with Fairtrade or just sparked short-term interest. Therefore, it is crucial to find assessment tools that can clarify the reasoning behind the decline in engagement.

A decline in youth participation in climate activism may, in part, stem from a growing sense of apathy toward the climate crisis. Paradoxically, younger generations, who consistently express high levels of concern for the planet's future, also report feeling the least empowered to affect meaningful change. In a study of 10,000 individuals from ages 13 to 25, 75% stated that they found the future of the planet frightening, and 83% believed that older generations had done a poor job in taking care of the environment (Hopenwasser, 2024). As projections for the future

have become increasingly dire, many young people have adopted a habit of disassociating the issue as a defense mechanism, which can manifest as perceived apathy. This disconnect may not indicate a lack of concern, however. The uncertainty in understanding why the youth disconnects underscores a critical gap that our research seeks to pursue. With growing pressure on children and young adults to care deeply about the environment, a majority of the youth do not have opportunities which would allow them to make an actual difference. Addressing this gap, and others leading to a lack of engagement, is essential for fostering sustained engagement in climate and social justice initiatives, as well as Fairtrade activism.

Fairtrade UK, our sponsor, is focusing on these issues in the United Kingdom. Fairtrade UK certifies products that meet Europe's increased social, economic, and environmental standards. Fairtrade UK also specializes in ethical goods and supply chains, making sure the consumer can purchase goods which have been ensured to be fair throughout the production and delivery process (Fairtrade, 2026). However, focusing on consumerism to assist climate and social justice has led to gaps in what people know about Fairtrade's mission beyond just certifying ethical goods. While Fairtrade's logo (see Figure 4) is almost universally recognized in the UK, the meaning behind the seal is lost on many, especially younger people (E. Fernandez-Lee, personal communication, February 16, 2026). Thus, Fairtrade UK needs data on how people perceive the organization, as well as barriers preventing the younger generations from engaging beyond just shopping.

Figure 4: The Fairtrade International Logo



Note. From About Fairtrade International, by Fairtrade International, n.d.,
<https://www.fairtrade.net/en/about/about-fairtrade-international.html>

3.0 Methodology

The goal of our project is to increase meaningful youth engagement (ages 13-25) with Fairtrade's broader mission beyond ethical shopping. To successfully achieve this goal, we have identified the following three objectives:

1. Assess youth's current knowledge of Fairtrade
2. Identify and evaluate best practices for increasing participation in social justice activism among those aged 13-25
3. Develop strategies to increase and sustain youth's engagement with Fairtrade

Our team formatted our objectives in a sequential manner, so that the final objective builds upon the findings from the first two. Our first two objectives required data collection. For our third objective, we used the analysis of our collected data to make informed suggestions about Fairtrade's current educational content and tools (see Appendix A for the timeline). In the following sections, the methods associated with each objective are detailed.

3.1 Assess youth's current knowledge of Fairtrade

To meet this objective, the team conducted surveys with students at the University of Worcester and Heart of Worcestershire College, as well as with university-aged participants in the Worcester City Center. In addition, we conducted surveys of secondary school students in England with the support of local educators. Surveys were conducted using WPI's Qualtrics software. Participants were given a brief overview of the topics of the survey and the expectations for their participation.

University and secondary school student participants were surveyed about their knowledge of their school's affiliation with Fairtrade, as well as their current engagement with the organization. Topics covered by the questions included their willingness to buy Fairtrade products, whether they were aware of Fairtrade's broader mission of social justice, how they previously heard about Fairtrade, barriers preventing them from participating, what activities would help them engage more, and limited demographic information such as age. Those who

were not enrolled in higher education were also surveyed in a very similar manner so that we could diversify our data beyond just students (Appendices B, C, D). The survey that was created for this task was a single dynamic Qualtrics survey. Participants were asked to select a particular age range and school, which then directed them to different questions for each age or education-based group as shown in Appendices B, C, and D. For example, if the participant said they were a university student, only university specific questions followed. Similar survey rules applied if the respondents identified as secondary school students or being over the age of 25. All participants were also asked to consent to having their responses recorded at the start of each survey and it is important to note that all questions in the survey were optional, as stated in our informed consent page (see Appendix E).

3.2 Identify and evaluate best practices for increasing participation in social justice activism among those aged 13-25

To achieve this objective, we investigated and documented how educators currently teach Fairtrade, and how they can improve their current practices. To do this, we used archival document analysis and interviews with Fairtrade educators.

Our team acquired data by documenting methods and strategies from past lessons, workshops, and presentations created by Fairtrade and other similar organizations. The team identified and documented current Fairtrade practices and potential new strategies that could be implemented by the organization; these strategies were then evaluated for effectiveness based on their reported success by Fairtrade educators and analysis of academic research. We examined this data in combination with scholarly literature to create a comprehensive literature review.

Additionally, we interviewed individuals who have led workshops related to Fairtrade and social activism to learn about their experiences with engaging young people. Using the interview questions found in Appendix F, our team gathered qualitative data on strategies that the interviewees implemented to successfully (or unsuccessfully) engage young people with Fairtrade. Interviewees were asked questions regarding how their everyday work related to Fairtrade. This included how long they have been educators, and what they believe is the best

strategy for engaging individuals in the Fairtrade Foundation. All interviewees signed an informed consent statement prior to the interview. Our team requested consent to record the audio of the conversations and took detailed notes. All recordings were used solely for our analysis. This includes taking direct quotes and examining trends between interviewees. Once the data was aggregated into our report, all records of participation in the interviews were then deleted following the analysis.

3.3 Develop strategies to increase and sustain youth's engagement with Fairtrade

To complete this objective, our team noted trends in the target demographic and formulated conclusions based upon the previous objectives. We analyzed the different methods and tools educators used to promote Fairtrade workshops and how they sustained participant engagement within them. We combined this with data gathered on engagement trends identified from the youth surveys. With these two sets of complementary data, we created new strategies that Fairtrade could use to increase and sustain long-term youth engagement. Each proposed recommendation contains detailed descriptions of sample implementations and how it addresses the identified gaps and concepts found within our data analysis.

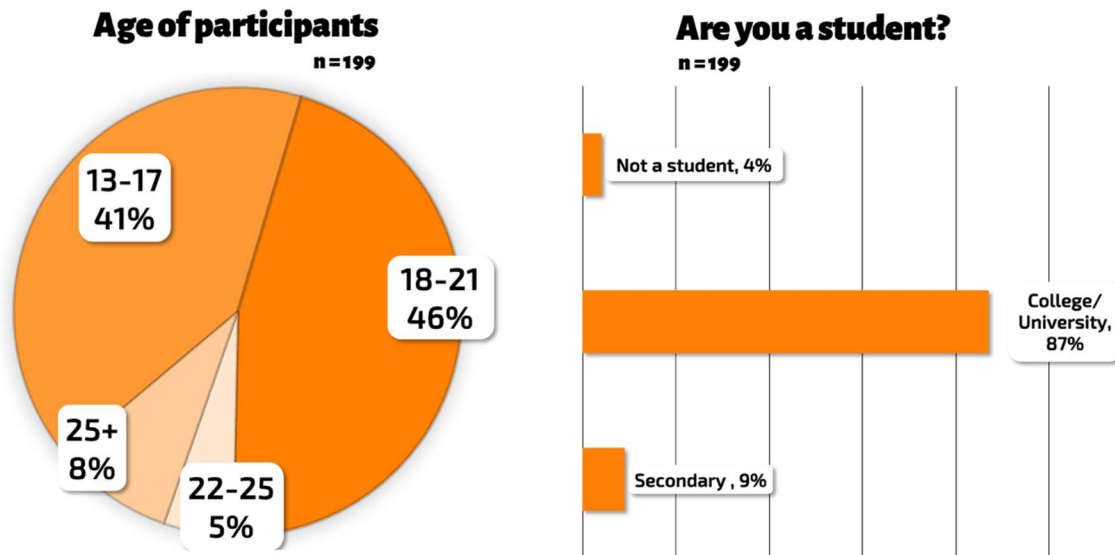
4.0 Results and Analysis

This section discusses the results of the methods outlined in Section 3.0 and analyzes them in relation to the project objectives. Surveys with University of Worcester and Heart of Worcestershire College students, as well as the general youth in Worcestershire, were analyzed to highlight trends in youth engagement with Fairtrade UK. We analyzed the transcripts from our interviews with Fairtrade educators and experts to guide the process of creating strategies the youth could pursue to further engage with the organization.

4.1 Current Youth Perspective

Our team created and distributed an online Qualtrics survey to our target youth demographics. This is in alignment with our first objective, to assess youth's knowledge of Fairtrade. Our primary survey population was students from the University of Worcester and the Heart of Worcestershire College. In addition to college and university students, some secondary school students were surveyed as well, totaling 201 responses. Out of 199 responses, about 42% of responses were ages 13-17 and 47% between the ages of 18-21. Among these responses, 87% were college/university students (n = 199).

Figure 5: Charts of survey demographics



We based these findings on the survey data collected through Qualtrics, using Excel to visualize responses and make patterns more apparent. By examining these charts, we were able to identify key trends and highlight the data points that best reflect young people’s current understanding of Fairtrade.

Brand Recognition vs Brand Engagement

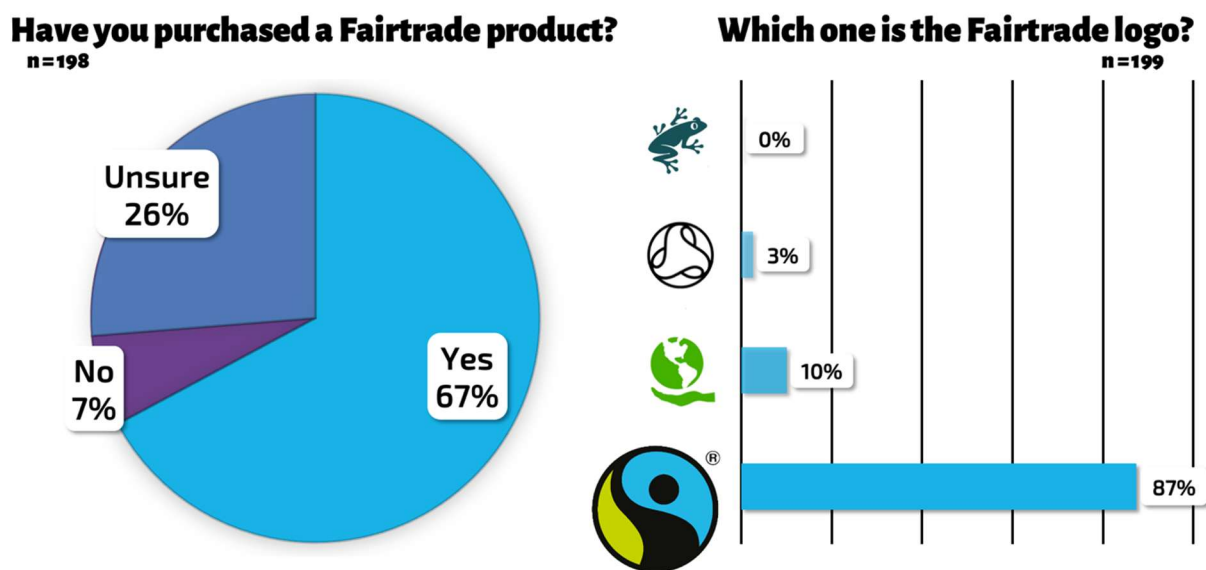
Based on the results of the survey, we noted an important theme between the disparity of brand recognition and engagement. Fairtrade claims the Fairtrade logo is one of the most recognizable ethical brand labels in the world (Fairtrade, n.d.). To test this claim, in our survey we asked respondents the following two questions:

1. Have you heard of Fairtrade before today?
2. Which of the following do you think is the Fairtrade logo?

Around 70% of respondents noted that they have heard of Fairtrade before, leaving only 60 responses who selected the “no” option. It is a good sign of brand recognition when 70% of people have heard of something related to the organization beforehand; however, this question

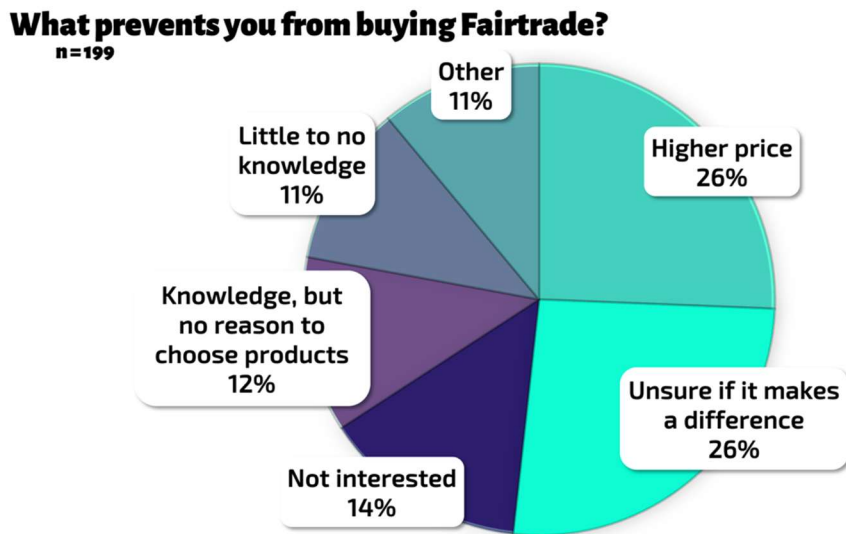
does not probe the levels of their Fairtrade knowledge. Out of the 60 people who selected “no”, 39 respondents still correctly identified the Fairtrade logo. This statistic shows that even with little knowledge about Fairtrade, a majority of the surveyed youth still recognize the logo. Overall, 87% of respondents correctly identified the Fairtrade logo, and out of the 70% who heard about Fairtrade, 97% of them correctly identified the Fairtrade logo. It is evident that there is high recognition of Fairtrade among the youth.

Figure 6: Charts of youth brand recognition



When it comes to engaging with Fairtrade, the perceived method of engagement has been through buying the organization’s products. In our survey group, 67% of respondents have purchased a Fairtrade product before and 27% were unsure if they had. While we did not ask how frequently they purchase Fairtrade products, there is a possibility that they do not actively seek out buying Fairtrade products, and that if they did purchase one, it may have coincidentally been Fairtrade certified.

Figure 7: Chart describing barriers to youth engagement

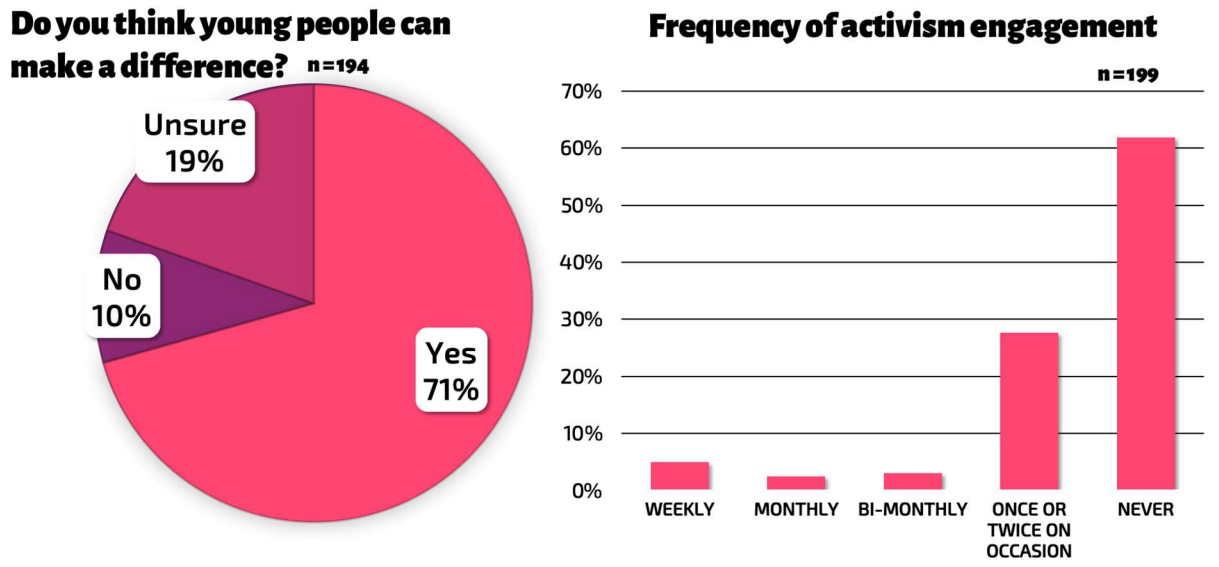


The most common barriers cited that prevent youth from buying Fairtrade products are high prices and a lack of understanding of Fairtrade’s mission. Combining this with the fact that youth may not seek out Fairtrade products, we recognized a trend of low engagement with Fairtrade.

Belief in Change without Action

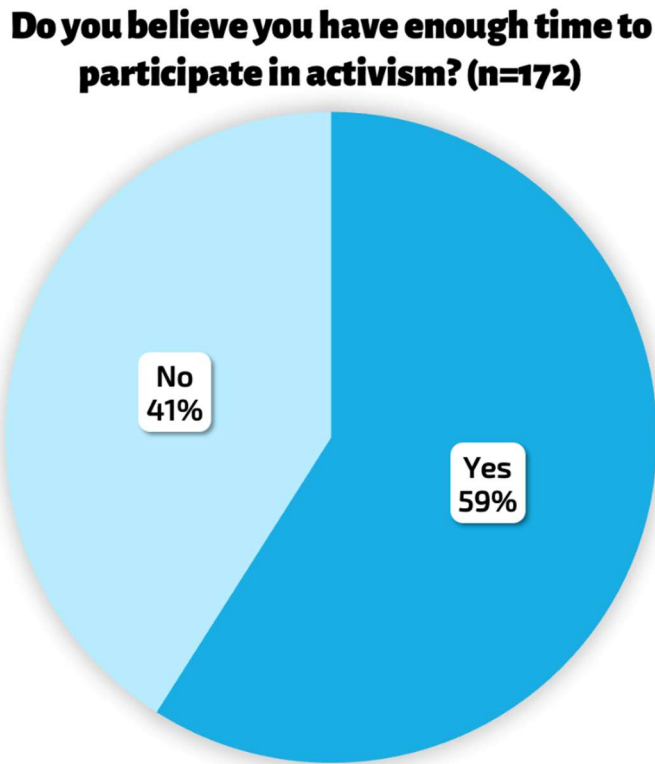
Results from the survey showed that there is a general belief that young people can make change in global issues, but very few respondents said that they themselves frequently take part in activism. 70% of respondents (n = 195) thought that “young people can make a real difference in global issues like climate change or fair wages/labor practices.”

Figure 8: Chart describing youth's perception of activism



Additionally, most respondents care about social justice activism. When asked to quantify how much social justice activism mattered to them on a scale from 1 to 5, respondents had a mean rating of 3.51 out of 5 (n = 169). However, 62% of respondents reported never engaging in any form of activism and 28% only participated on occasion (n = 200). Respondents seem to believe that young people can make a change to societal issues, but there is very little interest in taking part in activism.

Figure 9: Chart depicting whether students believe they have time for activism



Looking deeper into why students specifically do not engage in activism, practical barriers often appear. Of these barriers, a majority of students cite a lack of time as a crucial reason they cannot participate in large-scale activism. In secondary schools, the curriculum is not flexible enough to accommodate activities outside of school. In settings of higher education, students are often too focused on working a job, managing classes, and balancing other tasks to properly engage.

Perception between a Fairtrade School and a non-Fairtrade School

As we conducted surveys at two higher education institutions, University of Worcester (UoW) and Heart of Worcestershire College (HoW), we investigated whether being a Fairtrade school played a role in student perceptions. The University of Worcester has received a 2-star Fairtrade University award, while the Heart of Worcestershire College does not have an official certification. 28% of students at HoW believed that the school was a Fairtrade school and 69.9%

were unsure. At UoW on the other hand, only 19% were confident that the school was a Fairtrade school and 79% were unsure. One of our initial assumptions was that students in a Fairtrade school would be more aware and knowledgeable about Fairtrade's mission. It seems that the assumption was wrong. More students at the non-Fairtrade school assumed their school held a Fairtrade status. Surprisingly, students at the Fairtrade accredited school believed that theirs' was not, and both student bodies were unaware of what being a Fairtrade school means. The limited public knowledge about the university award program highlights the need for increased awareness of what the program means.

4.2 Key Interview Findings

Our team interviewed six individuals with experience as Fairtrade educators or ambassadors, as well as one educator in an adjacent area of sustainability. The purpose of these interviews was to gather data for Objective 2: to identify the best practices currently used to increase Fairtrade engagement among young people. We conducted online interviews with a focus on answering the questions found in Appendix F. After recording and transcribing data from each interview, we synthesized the responses into one document. We identified common themes in the responses of all the interviewees and present our findings using these key trends.

Engagement in Schools

Schools are the best opportunity for Fairtrade education and engagement of young people. However, the interviews showed that the most effective methods of engagement change based on the age and experience of the students. Therefore, this section is split up into primary school, secondary school, and university.

Engagement in Primary School

Some primary schools in the United Kingdom have had success with engaging students with Fairtrade through clubs. At one very successful Fairtrade club, students frequently take part in Fairtrade-related activities such as: writing information for their school's Fairtrade website, making posters, and writing letters to supermarkets to stock Fairtrade products. Additionally, they also run bake sales and have days when they all wear Fairtrade colors. Interviewees emphasized the importance of using events like these to make the club a social hub for the students. Another trend our team noticed in the successful Fairtrade schools was that the students who were "eco-warriors" tended to also be involved with Fairtrade. Overall, the most successful instances of Fairtrade clubs in primary schools tend to be where students form social bonds over their interest in Fairtrade.

Outside of clubs, interviewees noted that some primary schools have conferences or assemblies to learn about Fairtrade. These assemblies are effective at times, but students often do not care or pay attention. Some schools also include Fairtrade in their geography section, but there was no indication in the interviews that these classes are particularly effective in engaging students with Fairtrade.

Engagement in Secondary School

As compared to primary school, secondary school students tend to be even more difficult to engage regarding Fairtrade. Interviewees noted that the combination of academic pressure and extracurricular activities, such as sports, does not leave much time or desire to engage with Fairtrade. However, one interviewee noted that students are "starting to gain a bit more ... independence when [they] get to secondary school." This allows for increased engagement for students who were previously engaged with Fairtrade; however, it is difficult for Fairtrade to engage those who were not previously engaged. One potential remedy, noted by a former Fairtrade ambassador, is that high-achieving students find value in joining Fairtrade because they can use it as part of their application to university. This implies that targeting ambitious students is a potential strategy for Fairtrade to increase their secondary school.

Another interviewee who runs a Fairtrade club at their secondary school has seen great success with engaging students with Fairtrade's mission. They found that competitive activities are a great way to attract students who would otherwise be uninterested. Two examples of events that they ran were a baking competition with Fairtrade products, and a "Dragons' Den" sales pitch competition. Despite the success of these events, however, the interviewee noted that "it would be good to have a bank of things like activities for pupils to do that are a bit older because a lot of what we could find was for primary school age groups." Therefore, it is possible that Fairtrade's lack of lesson plans could contribute to the subpar engagement at the secondary school level.

Engagement in Universities

At the university level, Fairtrade engagement takes on a different form. With the increased amount of autonomy allowed to university students, there is less structure to Fairtrade education and engagement. None of the interviewees mentioned evidence of university Fairtrade societies or classroom education on Fairtrade. Instead, Fairtrade engages with universities through accreditation. Fairtrade accredits universities which reach their standards in stocking Fairtrade-certified products, hosting Fairtrade events, and promoting education in trade justice sustainability. One interviewee who works at a Fairtrade accredited university noted that the events during Fairtrade Fortnight work well to introduce uninvolved students with Fairtrade. These events include competitions to win Fairtrade products, once again showing the impact that competition has on engaging young people with Fairtrade. However, a former Fairtrade auditor noted that some universities may complete the minimum requirements to become Fairtrade accredited without really influencing the student population.

Beyond the structure of the Fairtrade accreditation system, university students can become Fairtrade ambassadors. Passionate students are encouraged by Fairtrade to become ambassadors; however, our team found little evidence of active Fairtrade university ambassadors. With this system, there tend to be waves of students who are very engaged with Fairtrade, but once they graduate there is no one to replace them. One long time Fairtrade campaigner noted that "you've got to build this sort of momentum of people that will keep

going.” This issue connects to the lack of structure in Fairtrade engagement outside of school clubs.

Alternative Learning Techniques

One key theme that emerged from interviews was the fact that active learning is a popular method to teach students topics in a more creative way than traditional lecture-style teaching. Interviewees reported that students respond better to active learning techniques than presentations, such as learning about the life cycle of a banana, tasting Fairtrade food and drink, or connecting Fairtrade to activities that students already care about. Similarly to active learning, inquiry-based curriculum is popular; one primary school educator noted that their school’s inquiry-based curriculum allows for more student engagement with Fairtrade than would otherwise be possible. Inquiry-based learning allows students to follow lines of questioning which interest them. Another trend our team identified across our interviews was that students tended to be greatly affected by Fairtrade education when the educator could connect to the students beyond the “doom and gloom, facts and figures.” Some examples of successful events noted by interviewees were football-related activities, hunting for Fairtrade chocolates, and storytelling. Despite the consensus that lecture or presentation-based teaching is less effective than active learning, some interviewees noted exceptions. In their teaching, they found that using “shocking” facts or impactful videos showing the difference Fairtrade makes could be highly effective.

Engagement Outside of Schools

Engaging youth with Fairtrade outside of formal educational settings presents distinct challenges across different age groups. For primary school students, schools serve as the main point of exposure to global issues, as younger students generally lack the independence and agency to pursue engagement opportunities on their own. As students transition into secondary school, they gain greater autonomy in how they spend their time. However, both survey and interview data indicate that academic pressures and extracurricular commitments limit students’

capacity to engage with external organizations. Educators also noted that, during periods of rigorous testing, schools may discourage non-academic pursuits. Along with this, educators agree that Fairtrade's current messaging does not consistently resonate with this age group, making it difficult to communicate the relevance of its mission.

At the university level, students have significantly more freedom to engage with causes of their choosing, yet participation remains limited by practical constraints. Survey responses frequently cited a lack of time and financial limitations as primary barriers to engagement. Additionally, interviewees observed that many university students prioritize immediate personal and financial stability over involvement in organizations perceived as offering indirect benefits. Despite these barriers, several respondents indicated a willingness to engage with Fairtrade if these constraints were reduced, which suggests that interest exists but is not effectively translated into action.

While these challenges persist, the data highlights potential avenues for increasing engagement outside of schools. One promising approach is to frame Fairtrade involvement as a social and community-building opportunity through clubs and societies. Survey and interview results suggest that students are more likely to participate in activities, regardless of prior interest, when there are clear social incentives. As such, emphasizing peer connection and community engagement may be more effective than focusing solely on skill development.

Social media has also emerged as a critical tool for reaching younger audiences. Although the Fairtrade Foundation maintains an online presence, interview data suggests a disconnect between the current strategies that Fairtrade utilizes and the content formats that resonate with youth. Educators reported that short-form video content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok is particularly effective at capturing attention and encouraging interaction, whereas longer-form content tends to generate less engagement. However, platform effectiveness varies by demographic. For example, Facebook was noted to be more successful in engaging older community members with products and events, particularly in established Fairtrade-certified communities, such as the town of Camborne. These findings suggest that tailoring outreach strategies to platform-specific audiences may improve overall engagement outcomes.

4.3 Limitations

While our team was careful in the ways we collected data to ensure our results were as accurate as possible, there are still some limitations that we must note. The main limitation of our data collection was that it was biased by convenience sampling. Our survey results were mainly by respondents from the Worcester area but given the scale on which the Fairtrade Foundation works, we cannot assume our data encompasses their entire demographic. Additionally, we surveyed primarily college and university students. This was due to this population being within our target age range and readily available as we worked at the University of Worcester. We attempted to mitigate some of this bias by surveying at the Heart of Worcestershire College; however, this still limits our sample to predominantly students in higher education, which are not representative of the whole United Kingdom. Even our interviews were subject to this convenience sampling, as our interviewees already had connections Fairtrade. Another limitation of our data collection was that not everyone who agreed to take the survey began or finished it. To fully ensure ethical research, participants had the ability to answer only the questions they wanted to. Those who answered the survey less completely may already be less likely to engage with Fairtrade, which biases our data toward those who already engage with the organization more meaningfully.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the results found in Section 4.0, our team has compiled the following recommendations for Fairtrade UK to increase and sustain its youth engagement. These recommendations are meant to be a framework for the Fairtrade Foundation to use as a tool to engage young people from primary school until after secondary school and university. Our framework is split up into long-term and short-term recommendations. Short-term recommendations require limited resources and can be implemented relatively quickly. Our long-term recommendations will require significant amount of time and resources for implementation.

Short-Term Recommendations

1. Create a resource to help establish standardized Fairtrade societies

Based on the results from our interviews with Fairtrade educators, one of the most pertinent recommendations our team can provide is regarding the need for Fairtrade societies to be more aligned with one another, both inside and outside of the formal education system. Currently, results suggest that there is no set method for creating, organizing, and maintaining societies. This causes a disconnect between the different groups' missions, as well as intermittent waves of participation, such as when one group of Fairtrade supporters moves on, and there is no one to replace them. Our team, in collaboration with our sponsor, created an example handbook to better guide the Fairtrade community. This handbook (informally "zine") discusses why students should choose to support Fairtrade, how to start the club and gain membership, and a list of activities which support Fairtrade's mission in trade justice activism (Appendix G). Fairtrade can use this example to guide their own creation of a handbook to help standardize and align Fairtrade societies, and to recruit new members.

2. Reimagine the Fairtrade University award

Building upon survey responses, interviews with Fairtrade auditors, and research into Fairtrade's certifications, our team recommends the reimagining of the Fairtrade University

award. In the point-based star system currently used, many Fairtrade-certified universities go out of their way to achieve the first star (and therefore become certified), but hardly ever do more to achieve the second and third star. We have identified this is, in part, due to a lack of incentive. When the award was introduced, it was the first of its kind. Such a certification was enough of an incentive to work towards it, even for schools not focused on trade justice. Now, with multiple certifications from different organizations available, schools can choose ones which align more with their institution's values. To stand out against these other certifications, we recommend that Fairtrade gives schools a reason to achieve more than just the minimum required to be certified. This could be done through actions like national recognition at the [Fairtrade Symposium](#) and awarding Fairtrade-funded scholarships for students who participate at high-ranking Fairtrade schools. Further, we recommend that more emphasis is placed on the student involvement sections of the Fairtrade award. The current award system gives points for student involvement but does not have very stringent requirements for student-led Fairtrade initiatives.

3. Continue to encourage private activism

Some of Fairtrade's current tactics, such as protests and marches, are effective methods for engaging those above age 30. However, as shown in Figure 9, the younger generations lack the time to pursue these large-scale activist activities. Despite this barrier, the youth still believe they can make a meaningful difference. We recommend that Fairtrade should, in addition to trying to show the benefits of their current engagement strategies, focus on fostering the ways that the youth wish to participate. Our team believes, based on survey results on how frequently the youth already engage (see Figure 8), that encouraging private activism will be effective in driving engagement. While Fairtrade already does this somewhat, through their certified products in stores, other meaningful activities like avoiding fast fashion and letter writing could also be encouraged as a meaningful part of Fairtrade's engagement strategy.

Long-Term Recommendations

1. Unite Fairtrade societies, communities, and other groups

There are strong pockets of dedicated Fairtrade campaigners, clubs, and ambassadors throughout the United Kingdom. However, these organizations are somewhat isolated from the Fairtrade Foundation as well as other groups of Fairtrade supporters. Our team recommends connecting all Fairtrade societies, communities, and groups together. To strengthen this domestic connection between Fairtrade groups our team proposes to increase the prominence of Fairtrade conferences, connect Fairtrade community leaders from different areas of the UK, and establish consistent streams of information from the Fairtrade Foundation to the various groups. One example of community connection could be to have Fairtrade universities run Fairtrade conferences for primary and secondary schools, as we found that passionate university students are strong role models for younger students. In Fairtrade communities, more consistent communication between Fairtrade groups and Fairtrade UK would serve to spread ideas for Fairtrade events and campaigns. Connecting current Fairtrade supporters may also help attract new Fairtrade supporters and sustain membership in Fairtrade groups.

2. Improve current social media strategies

From the surveys and interviews, our team noticed that the use of social media as a tool for engagement is frequently mentioned. In the written response sections of the survey, many youth respondents noted that more social media presence would have motivated them to engage with Fairtrade. However, when discussing this topic with the Fairtrade educators, they noted the disconnect between the strategies that Fairtrade implements and the content formats that resonate with youth. Our team recommends that Fairtrade reworks their online presence to be more flexible and up to date with current trends. Social media is continuously evolving; strategies which worked the week prior may not work the next week. A fixed content plan may not be effective in this environment. A dedicated team could focus on more effectively managing their social media presence. Having such a team would also present the opportunity for Fairtrade to have student interns working on their social media. Not only

would this act as an incentive for students to engage with the organization, but these interns would also be invaluable resources into the content which engages their generation.

3. Incentivizing Fairtrade student involvement

Current Fairtrade engagement programs are not designed in a manner which incentivizes students' involvement. From our current survey results, students agree with Fairtrade ideologies, but do not pursue further engagement. This stems from the barrier of limited benefits from working with the Fairtrade organization. For students to benefit from Fairtrade, it may be best to frame current and future student involvement as academic or career development opportunities. By framing opportunities in this manner, Fairtrade may attract highly driven youth who seek these extracurricular opportunities. Recognizing these individuals for outstanding involvement with awards or positional titles will incentivize the students to work for recognition. The titles and awards can be used for college or job applications. Another way to encourage students' involvement can be through providing opportunities to intern with the Fairtrade organization. Interning with Fairtrade will allow for students to develop professional skills for future careers in a manner that aligns with the Fairtrade mission.

6.0 Conclusion

Our findings highlighted a clear gap between awareness and engagement among youth. While many students are familiar with Fairtrade, fewer take consistent action, pointing to the need for more accessible and engaging opportunities for involvement. Despite this, there is strong potential for growth. With continued support from schools and organizations like the Fairtrade Foundation, youth engagement can move beyond awareness toward meaningful action. Overall, this project demonstrates that with the right strategies, fostering active participation in Fairtrade is both achievable and promising.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Project Timeline

In this appendix, we present the timeline we created to plan and manage the major tasks for the project on a weekly basis.

TASK	WEEK							
	PQP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Archival Document Research	■	■						
Plan Interviews	■	■						
Survey University Students		■	■	■				
Interview Educators		■	■	■				
Analyze Data from Surveys, Interviews				■	■			
Final Project Report						■	■	■
Created Sponsor Deliverables							■	■

Appendix B. General Survey Questions for Youth Age 13-25

This appendix contains a copy of the survey questions that every participant who took the survey was asked to capture data about Fairtrade awareness and engagement from the youth.

1. What is your age?
 - a. Under 13
 - b. 13-17
 - c. 18-21
 - d. 22-25
 - e. Over 25
2. Are you a Secondary or a College/University Student?
 - a. Secondary Student
 - b. College/University Student
 - c. Not a Student
3. Have you heard of Fairtrade before today?
 - a. Yes
 - i. If yes, how did you first hear about Fairtrade?
 1. School/College/University
 2. Social Media
 3. Friends/Family
 4. News/Media
 5. Unsure, but I have heard of it
 6. Other (please specify): _____
 - b. No
4. To your knowledge, have you ever purchased a Fairtrade-Certified Product?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
5. Which of the following do you think is the Fairtrade logo?
 - a. UK Organic food logo



b. Fairtrade Logo



c. Rainforest Alliance Logo



d. Green Peace logo



6. How often do you engage in any form of activism? (ex: letter writing, protesting, petitioning)

a. Weekly

- b. Monthly
 - c. More than once a year
 - d. Once or twice on occasion
 - e. Never
7. Do you believe that Fairtrade products are more expensive than alternatives?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
8. What prevents you from buying Fairtrade products more often?
- a. Higher price
 - b. Little to no knowledge of Fairtrade
 - c. Knowledge of Fairtrade, but no reason to choose Fairtrade products
 - d. Unsure if it makes a difference
 - e. Not interested
 - f. Other (please specify)
9. What would make you more likely to engage with Fairtrade Activities?
- a. [Short Answer]
10. If you have engaged in sustainable practices, what are they? (ex: recycling, gardening, riding a bike to school)
- a. [Short Answer]
11. How much does climate crisis activism matter for you on a scale of 1-5? (1 being not important at all, 5 being extremely important)
12. How much does social justice activism matter for you on a scale of 1-5? (1 being not important at all, 5 being extremely important)
13. Do you think young people can make a real difference in global issues like climate change or fair wages/labor practices?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
14. Please explain the reasoning behind your response to the previous question.

Appendix C. Additional Survey Questions for University Students

This appendix contains a copy of the survey questions that every participant who answered that they were a college or university student was asked to capture data about their school's involvement with Fairtrade.

1. *Optional:* What School/College/University do you go to?
2. Is your school a Fairtrade School?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
3. Do you feel that, as a university student, you have enough time to engage in activism or other ethical campaigns?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Have you ever had dedicated lessons about Fairtrade in school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure

Appendix D. Additional Survey Questions for Secondary School Students

This appendix contains a copy of the survey questions that every participant who answered that they were a secondary school student was asked to capture data about their school's involvement with Fairtrade.

1. *Optional:* What School/University do you go to?
2. Is your school a Fairtrade School?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
3. Have you ever had dedicated lessons about Fairtrade in school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure

Appendix E. Informed Consent Statement for Surveys

This appendix contains a copy of the informed consent statement that was attached to our surveys. It makes the participant aware that, while the study contains minimal risk, they are free to skip questions or stop the survey at any time.

Please read before continuing to the next page

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you agree, however, you must be fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and any benefits, risks or discomfort that you may experience as a result of your participation. This page presents information about the study so that you may make a fully informed decision regarding your participation.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to gather data on relevant thoughts, attitudes, attributes, and beliefs regarding awareness and current engagement with Fairtrade UK.

Potential Risks:

Study participants may feel uncomfortable with questions related to pay or education.

Record Keeping and Confidentiality:

All survey responses will be anonymous, and the data will be compiled into our report, but individual responses will be deleted after the duration of the study is completed.

Compensation or Treatment in the Event of Injury:

This research does not involve any risk of injury or harm, and no medical compensation will be available due to the research study being conducted. We do not give up any of our legal rights by participating in this survey.

Your participation in this research is voluntary:

Your refusal to participate will not result in any penalty to you or any loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. You may decide to stop participating in the survey at any time without penalty or loss of other benefits. The project investigators retain the right to cancel or postpone the experimental procedures at any time they see fit.

For more information about this research or about the rights of research participants, or in case of research-related injury, contact: IQP Team Fairtrade, Email: gr-UK26FAIRTeam@wpi.edu, IRB Manager (Ruth McKeogh, Tel. 508 831-6699, Email: irb@wpi.edu) and the Human Protection Administrator (Gabriel Johnson, Tel. 508-831-4989, Email: gjohnson@wpi.edu).

By continuing with this survey, you consent to all the information in the statement above.

Appendix F. Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Fairtrade Educators

This appendix contains a copy of the questions we asked Fairtrade educators during interviews to gather data how they engage with youth so we could formulate strategies for Fairtrade to sustain youth engagement.

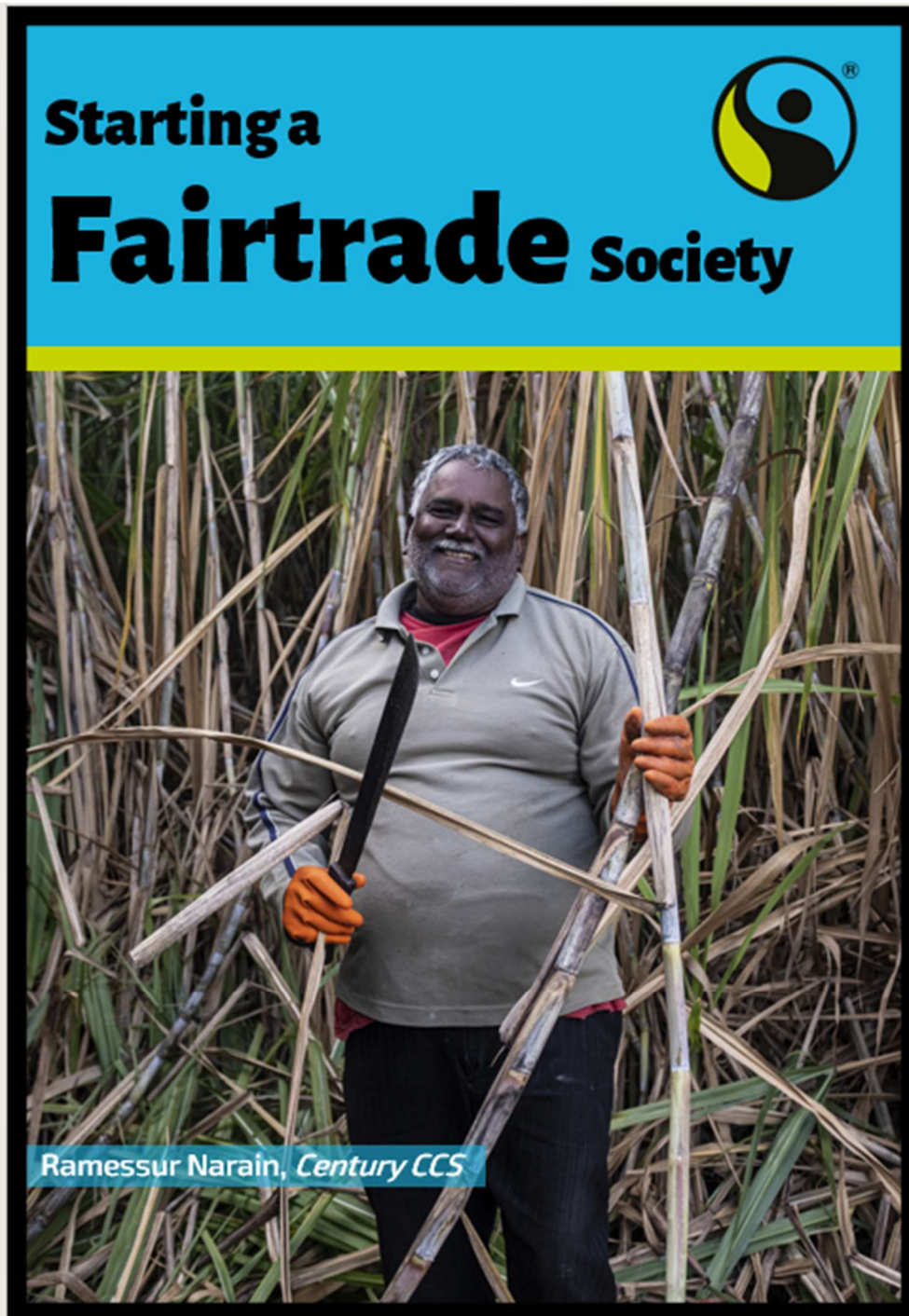
Hello, and thank you for taking the time to assist with this project. We are a team of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, a university in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA, collecting data for a research project. We are working with Fairtrade UK to increase meaningful youth engagement (ages 13-25) with Fairtrade's broader mission beyond ethical shopping. Your participation will help us understand potential barriers preventing further engagement, as well as meaningful ways we can increase activity. This research will be published on our university's academic database; however, no identifying information will be included in the publication. Direct quotes may be used anonymously if you grant us permission. We are seeking qualitative data regarding youth engagement in Fairtrade and will ask you a series of questions related to your experience, age, and perspectives. The interview should take approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Participation in the interview is voluntary, and you may decline to answer questions, pause, or stop the interview at any time. After our research is completed, all records of your participation will be deleted. Feel free to ask us any questions before we begin. You may contact us at any time after the interview at gr-UK26FAIRTeam@wpi.edu

1. What is your name? (check spelling)
2. What is your primary position/relation to Fairtrade?
 - a. What does this job require you to do?
3. Is there a specific name for your program?
4. If applicable, how many Fairtrade workshops/activities have you led? (estimate)
 - a. Who is the regular demographic of individuals who attend these activities?
 - i. Is there any demographic that you find to be particularly interested in Fairtrade?
 - b. Where are your workshops/activities conducted?
 - c. In what academic setting do these Fairtrade workshops/activities occur?

5. How long have you been leading these workshops?
6. What type of content is covered in your Fairtrade workshops/activities and the learning objectives addressed?
7. How do you distinguish Fairtrade's role in ethical shopping compared to the organization's role in broader environmental activism?
 - a. How do you believe your students perceive Fairtrade?
8. What methods or activities have you used in Fairtrade workshops to engage students?
 - a. In your opinion, which activities seem to be most effective? Least effective?
 - b. What are specific indicators that you use to measure how engaged students are when in the workshop/class?
 - i. How do you assess the participants' achievement of the learning objectives of your workshops?
 - c. Would there be any opportunity for our team to observe these activities?
 - i. If yes, how would we facilitate this?
9. How do you present Fairtrade activism and ideals to students?
 - a. How often do you utilize Fairtrade initiatives in learning-based activities for students (ex: simulations, teaching lessons, games)?
10. How have you found students continue to engage with Fairtrade or Fairtrade-related topics after the workshop/class?
11. Have there been any particular facts, statistics, or ideas that you have shared with students that they have found surprising or interesting?
12. What would help you increase students' engagement with Fairtrade?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share with our team about your experience as a Fairtrade educator?
14. Any questions for our team?

Appendix G. Society Handbook

This appendix presents the prototype handbook on how to form a Fairtrade society our team created to assist Fairtrade with the standardization of their different groups.



Why Fairtrade?



The work done in Fairtrade communities directly affects farmers and workers disadvantaged by global trade systems.

Fairtrade works with ~1,900 producer organisations in 70 countries

Fairtrade collaborates with farmers around the world to improve living and working conditions, send children to school, empower women, and help fight against climate change.



Sobeida Esther Ahumada Camacho, *Emprebancoop*



Marbin Asunción Villegas, *Sol & Café*



Kapkiyai co-operative, in Nandi-Hills

What is a Fair-ciety?

A Fairtrade society promotes ethical shopping, trade justice, and sustainability!



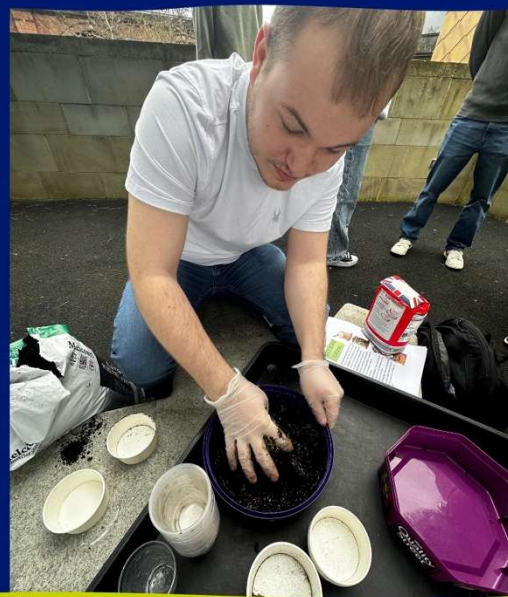
Fairtrade societies run activities that raise awareness and funds for Fairtrade.



Why You Should Join!

Take Action!

- **Experience** the joy that comes from helping others
- **Meet** new people with similar interests
- **Add** to your CV
- **Gain** leadership and volunteer experience



- **Develop** professional skills
- **Attend** fun events
- **Learn** about Fairtrade

Real Impact!

How to Start?



- 1. Find a group of friends or colleagues** who are interested in trade justice, social justice, or sustainability
- 2. Research local Fairtrade initiatives** to find ambassadors or campaigners to work with
- 3. Find a place** to meet in your community, like your local library, community center, or coffee shop (that sells Fairtrade coffee, of course)
- 4. Reach out to the Fairtrade Foundation** for resources such as workshop material, latest news, impact stories, and more
- 5. Use social media** to gain new members, share locations to buy Fairtrade goods, and connect to other communities
- 6. Run Fairtrade events** such as those seen on the "Activity Ideas" page (p. 7)
- 7. Connect** with other Fairtrade societies across the UK!



You can reach out to Fairtrade UK with any additional questions!

Society Organization

Consider having roles!

Roles create a sense of ownership and can help facilitate activities. Consider roles such as: President, Content Lead, Event Planner, etc.

Connect with the sustainability department!

If you are at a university, reach out to your school's sustainability lead for help creating a society. Also, advertise to the rest of the university using social media, posters, or on campus events.

Contact the Fairtrade Foundation for additional resources on creating and maintaining a Fairtrade society.



Activity Ideas



Tea/wine tasting

Taste an assortment of Fairtrade's tea or wine. These events are a great way to introduce community members to Fairtrade.



Baking competition

Society members can compete by making baked goods out of Fairtrade supplies. This is a fun way to connect with baking lovers.

Fairtrade scavenger hunt
Take a group trip around the town to check out local stores with Fairtrade goods.



References/ Photo Creds.

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Additional photos sourced directly from Fairtrade UK

This reference was created by:

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Worcester Polytechnic Institute, May 2026



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