

# Collaboration with charity supports real-world learning for students

Students at Northumbria University have gained real-world knowledge and experience from a collaboration with the charity dedicated to preserving Newcastle's green spaces.

[Urban Green Newcastle](#), the organisation which looks after parks and allotments across the city, worked with University staff to develop a brief for students studying International Relations and Politics or History and Politics to come up with proposals for engaging children in co-designing local parks in ways which would help pollinators to thrive.

Developed around the concept of Participatory Budgeting (PB), a form of democratic engagement in which residents and community groups decide how a pre-determined amount of public money is to be spent, the brief became a live project and involved representatives from Urban Green Newcastle selecting three of the student proposals to be presented at a special event earlier this year.



Left to right: Student Heledd Rimmer is pictured using the winning activity booklet with Catherine (7), Senior Lecturer Rachael Chapman and Beelines Education Officer with Urban Green Newcastle, Rachel Faichnie

In true democratic style, students then deliberated and voted on the final three ideas, with the winning proposal brought to life thanks to a cash injection by the University's careers and employability service, [Graduate Futures](#).

Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Politics, Rachael Chapman, said: "This project is an innovative experiential learning activity for our students and blends independent research with teaching and a focus on employability. Working with partners like Urban Green Newcastle is key to supporting our students to acquire real-world experience in working with a client brief and a fixed budget to develop solutions to real life problems.

"It's been fantastic to see the students work enthusiastically and creatively to develop their proposals with support from Urban Green Newcastle, the University Library staff and the Graduate Futures team."

The winning proposal was an activity booklet to be used in Newcastle parks aimed at children aged five to seven years old based around a character called Buzzy the Bee. The booklet introduces youngsters to the bee lines or paths which pollinators would take, how wildflower hot spots may help encourage more bees and pollinators, and planting activities to be supervised by Urban Green Newcastle staff.

Students Tabitha Wilkins, Alex Stephenson, Heledd Rimmer, Francesca Chang and Karyan Martinez Nieto came up with the winning design and some of them were able to visit Paddy Freeman Park in Newcastle recently to see children from the High Heaton Rainbows group use the booklet for the first time.

Rachel Faichnie, Beelines Education Officer with Urban Green Newcastle, said the quality of student proposals had been exceptional: "The students excelled in this collaborative project and really exceeded our expectations. The project proposals were creative, engaging and very well thought out. It was clear how much effort the students had put into their ideas.

We have taken a lot of inspiration from the students' ideas at Urban Green Newcastle and, going forward, will integrate these into our education programme where suits. We plan to run the Buzzy the Bee project as a regular session with local schoolchildren in Newcastle."

Graham Baty, Head of Student and Graduate Enterprise at Northumbria University, said: "Our Graduate Futures offer supports students from their first year through to graduation, and beyond, with specialist careers guidance and employability advice.

“We are always looking for opportunities to also support enterprising and entrepreneurial activity within the curriculum and are delighted to have been able to provide funding for the experiential learning element of this live brief by helping to bring one of the projects to life.”

The [International Relations and Politics BA \(Hons\)](#) and [History and Politics BA \(Hons\)](#) programmes at Northumbria take an integrated approach to academic theory by applying it to real world problems and achieving 21<sup>st</sup> century employability skills.

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