

## Planning a 'Coffee House Challenge' Event'

### ***What is a coffee house challenge (CHC) event and how is it relevant to the Green Entrepreneurs Europe (GEE) programme?***

Coffee House Challenges, or CHC for short, were established by the Royal Society for the encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) in 2004. The aim is to bring: "people together to discuss problems in their area and come up with solutions to tackle anything from street crime to environmental issues".<sup>1</sup>

The GEE project is about collaborative thinking and a systems approach. Key to this is the developing, sharing and improving of ideas. The CHC format fits this perfectly. GEE seeks to bring together entrepreneurs, green businesses and students, thereby making the world of work interesting and relevant to students. The CHC format encourages discussion and debate, which is needed when tackling the complex and sometimes controversial ideas of the circular economy and sustainable living.

### ***What format should a CHC event have?***

There is no strict way this should be done- in fact it was approached slightly differently in each of the GEE partner countries. The fundamental principle is to bring students and businesses/ entrepreneurs together. The scope of your event might depend to some extent on how many guests you have invited. Here are some suggestions of how the event can be run:

**Event before final presentations.** One option is to stage the CHC event before students start on module 4 and develop their own business ideas (entrepreneurial thinking). This way, meeting the entrepreneurs should help to get students excited and motivated about planning their own businesses, in addition to picking up some tips. A good format at this stage is a market-place type event, where each business or entrepreneur is given a table where they base themselves with information about their business. Students circulate around the room in groups, speaking to the businesses and asking them questions. For this to be successful, it is essential that students have prepared questions beforehand and have a means of recording the answers. If you cannot find many entrepreneurs/ green businesses in your area, then invite 'normal' businesses too. Local businesses might be keen to get involved as it's also an opportunity to promote themselves, eg local cafes, nail salons, pet shops etc. The purpose of this event is for students to gain a greater understanding of how the world of business works, and to become excited and inspired by the idea. So although green businesses would be ideal, they aren't strictly necessary at this point.

**Event where students present their business plans.** This can also be successful and was the format piloted during piloting of the project. For this format it suggested to have no more than 3 guests, if all are talking about their business. This event would

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<sup>1</sup> BBC news website, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2006, accessed on: 05/08/2018  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics\\_show/5044016.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics_show/5044016.stm)

start with guest talking for about 5 minutes about their business. It's a good idea to give the guests some guidance, as many of them may be unfamiliar with talking to groups of students. Things to talk about are: how did they get into this career path, ie what subjects are relevant at school, did they go to college/ university/ what training have they done? What inspires them? What was/ is the greatest difficulty they face? Did anything go wrong? (It's reassuring for students to know that even adults get things wrong, and you actually end up learning lots from your mistakes). This can be followed by a question and answer sessions where students have the opportunity to ask businesses questions. After this the students should present their business plans. Depending on how many groups you have, you may want to do a pre-selection process before this point, so you don't have too many groups presenting. After this there should be an opportunity for the businesses to give feedback to the students. The guests can all be sat together to form a 'judging panel'. They can either give students feedback after each group has presented, or at the end, which gives your guests to discuss amongst themselves. Again, make sure that the guests are briefed on how to do this- feedback should be predominantly positive and constructive with perhaps one or two points for improvement, or things to consider. This can end with an overall 'winning' group or just leave it at every group having got their feedback.

**Both.** If you are able to organise both a more informal mixing event and also have guests watch the final presentations, then this is ideal. This will give students maximum exposure to businesses and help them see the value in their projects. It would also be nice for the businesses to see how students have taken on their advice and used it in their green business plans. If not all the guests are available a second time, then perhaps one guest could be invited for the final presentations, with the remaining 'judges' being made up of perhaps SLT members/ teachers from other subject, eg business.

### ***Where should it be conducted?***

Again there is no fixed format.

**At school:** Although the idea of having this as a casual event in a coffee shop sounds great, in practise it is unlikely to be practical for a school. The simplest way to run a CHC is to invite your guests to your school and have a room booked, perhaps the hall or a meeting room. Although this is perhaps not the most relaxed of environments, there are lots of benefits as it is free, convenient, the students don't need to travel anywhere and you have facilities such as computers and slideshow facilities. If you are doing this with another school near to you, then one school could host this, with the other school travelling to them.

**An external venue, eg a conference venue or, town hall.** This approach gives a sense of occasion to the event. It might also be more convenient for your business guests if it's in a town centre. However, costs and transport need to be considered.

**A coffee shop or similar venue.** If you only have a small group of students and want to create a more informal feeling, then approaching a café and seeing if they perhaps have a top floor or function room that you could use, would work well.

***Who can I contact to help me find guests for a CHC event?***

Contact our project partners 'Business in the Community'. They are a "business-led membership organisation made up of progressive businesses of all sizes who understand that the prosperity of business and society are mutually dependent."<sup>2</sup> Please contact Ian Nuttall who will be able to advise you of business links near to you: [ian.nuttall@bitcni.org.uk](mailto:ian.nuttall@bitcni.org.uk)

**Parents of children** who have started their own business and/ or work in a green/ sustainable industry. Perhaps you already know parents, or they could be asked, maybe in a school newsletter or by sending a letter home with your students.

Within school: if you have a **business department**, you could ask teachers or perhaps A-level students to come along as guests and judge student presentations. They could also be invited earlier in the process to give advice to students on their business plans.

***Any other top tips?***

**Students should prepare questions in advance:** If you are planning on having a question and answer session with your students and business then the students should prepare questions in advance. It can be quite intimidating for KS3 students to approach business people, so it is useful if they know in advance what kinds of things they can ask. These can be very general questions such as: what's the best and worst thing about working in your field/ setting up your own business/ do you have a role model, who inspired you etc etc. It's also nice if you have time to give the students time to research the business and ask questions related to their specific business.

**Be organised.** Remember business people are generally busy people and have volunteered their time to help you, so have a clear running order and try to keep to timings.

**Work with other schools.** This project is ideal to do in collaboration with another school. This means more people to investigate business links, support from other colleagues and also an element of competition for the students- not just amongst themselves, but also with students from another school.

**Don't forget to take photos!** These events are good publicity for your school and the business as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Business in the Community website, <https://www.bitc.org.uk/about-us>, accessed 17/08/2018

