

Mock COP26 gave young people a voice to speak to the powerful.

Josh Tregale describes his part in it.



Mock COP26 Staff Collage

Photo credit: MockCOP

The coronavirus pandemic has been devastating for people across the world. However, in the darkness there is always light and this pandemic offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape what is important to society and what our priorities should be.

Governments have, and will be, implementing unprecedented support packages to aid the recovery from this situation, with the possibility that funding can be targeted towards supporting the Earth and its inhabitants through nurturing a green recovery. This hope was why, after my A Level exams were suddenly cancelled and school closed, I got more involved in climate activism. This was my journey...

My climate change education tended to focus on invisible concepts: tiny

temperature rises, gases in the atmosphere. In reality, it tears families apart and infringes on human rights. That is why I joined Teach the Future (www.teachthefuture.uk), a group which campaigns for climate change to be added to the National Curriculum. I find it shocking that someone can go through formal education without ever learning about this defining issue and without any preparation for the impacts we will face.

When COP26 (the United Nations climate summit where world leaders are supposed to work together to tackle the climate emergency) was postponed due to Covid-19, activists at Teach the Future saw an opportunity for young people to run their own summit and to include areas that are often missed by international climate conferences. This idea quickly grew

and Mock COP26 was born. This project particularly excited me as it gave young people a voice and would illustrate the ambition of the next generation of leaders. In August the concept was finalised and with the support of Students Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS UK) we advertised for volunteers and student staff. In September I chose to defer my place at university so that I could be more involved as a Mock COP26 Event Coordinator.

The key themes we framed the conference around were Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs – these are carbon reduction commitments for individual nations); climate education; health and wellbeing; green jobs and climate justice. Too often some of these issues are ignored or side-lined at international

climate conferences. Mock COP26 was held between the 19th November and 1st December and involved over 330 delegates representing over 140 countries. We had speeches from high profile public figures including the COP26 President Alok Sharma, the UN Youth Envoy, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, as well as scientists, economists and youth activists.

All the content from the event can be viewed online on our YouTube channel. The event culminated in a closing ceremony with the UN climate talk's High Level Climate Action Champion, businessman Nigel Topping. The global declaration was released and included an ambitious yet realistic treaty including 18 policies from the five key areas of the event.

Delegates were supported by academic partners and lawyers to legally word the treaty and ensure it was achievable. The treaty and declaration can be viewed online at www.mockcop.org/treaty. The next step is to lobby world leaders to implement and acknowledge our treaty and to raise their climate ambition ahead of COP26 in November. I and other activists are now in regular contact with the Cabinet Office and other government departments working on COP26 as they work to host a successful summit.

At the start of 2020, I would never have imagined that a year later I would be in conversation with the Cabinet Office, the WHO and the UN! Or interviewed by international press having been a part of such a brilliant project which had over 26 million uses

of #MockCOP26, over 400 articles and a reach of 100 million people. It is so crucial to look beyond the disruption and setbacks this pandemic has caused and to see the opportunities. The recovery from this situation has the potential to leave a lasting legacy and signal a new phase in our commitment to preserve God's Creation and those who live in it. ■



Josh Tregale will be starting a degree in Mechanical Engineering at Imperial College London in the autumn. He is a member of St Paul's Church, Sherborne and is campaigning for his parish to divest from fossil fuels. He was an Event Coordinator for Mock COP26 (www.mockcop.org) and is the International Campaign Coordinator for Teach the Future.