Students, ethical purchasing and Fairtrade

Research into attitudes and behaviours amongst further and higher education students in the UK

January 2018
Key Findings
Key findings

An online survey with students in further and higher education, carried out in December 2017, received 2111 responses revealing that...

- Respondents say war and terrorism is a world issue they are most concerned about (54% very concerned, 36% fairly concerned). Human rights and climate change are of next most importance.
- 2 in 3 respondents say they already sign online petitions to address issues that concern them. Half share pages or links on social media and 45% claim to buy products with ethical credentials to address issues of concern.
- Almost half (48%) say they are very or fairly confident that the actions they personally take could make a difference in addressing issues of concern.

- Half of respondents (51%) had made a buying decision in the last month which was influenced by ethical standards, 27% had done so in the last week.
- 1 in 5 said that ethical standards of products they buy, and the companies that sell them, matter to them a great deal. A further 45% said this mattered to them a fair amount.
- Good quality products that are produced by workers who are treated well and are environmentally friendly are what respondents look for when buying goods that are produced in an ethical way.
- Cost is the main reason why respondents are less likely to buy ethical products (60%). A lack of awareness and availability of information about ethical credentials also deters them from buying such products (40%).
- Over half of respondents strongly agree that they want to buy more products that don’t harm people who produce them (54%) and agree companies need to be more responsible and ethical than they are at present (52%).
- Half (52%) say they most trust accreditation marks to provide ethical credentials of products. 1 in 4 (27%) say that information from charities and campaign organisations is their most trusted source of information about the ethical credentials of products.
Key findings

- 94% said they had seen the Fairtrade logo. For many, Fairtrade means workers/farmers are paid a fair price for the goods they produce.
- Bananas are the most frequently purchased Fairtrade item with 39% saying they always buy Fairtrade bananas over those without the Fairtrade label. Fairtrade tea/coffee is always chosen by a fifth (19%), over non Fairtrade products.
- 2 in 3 respondents say they care a lot about knowing the products they buy have been grown without child labour (68%) and that farmers in developing countries get a fair deal for the products they grow (64%).

Fairtrade awareness and purchasing

- University/college and students’ union cafes and restaurants are the main places Fairtrade products are recalled being available (mentioned by 36% and 30% respectively).
- 6 in 10 (59%) of respondents say that, other than on products themselves, they recall seeing the Fairtrade logo on displays in shops/cafes. A further 4 in 10 (38%) have seen the logo on posters around campus.
- 1 in 10 recalled seeing activity during Fairtrade Fortnight. There was mixed reaction to their colleges performance in relation to buying products with positive ethical credentials and Fairtrade products.
- Secondary education was where respondents were most likely to learn about issues linked to Fairtrade such as consumerism, global and ethical trade (39%), social justice (33%), human rights (42%) and environmental issues (48%).
- Respondents feel their university or college could do more to support Fairtrade by promoting and selling more products and making students more aware of what it is.
- 6 in 10 respondents had not seen or heard about Fairtrade type activities in their local community. Of the remainder 1 in 10 were aware of Fairtrade campaign groups or Fairtrade Fortnight events.
Research method and respondents
Objectives:

To gather feedback from students on:

- their ethical actions and concerns
- their ethical purchasing behaviours
- awareness of Fairtrade and how it impacts on their purchasing behaviour
- awareness of Fairtrade on campus and in their local community.

Method:

The survey was promoted online via the NUS Extra cardholder student database, as a survey about a range of issues rather than mentioning Fairtrade to ensure a wide range of views were captured. Prize draw of a share of £150 to encourage response.

The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. 2111 further and higher education students completed the survey.
The respondents

**LEVEL OF STUDY**
- HE: 65%
- FE: 27%
- Other: 6%
- Apprentices: 3%

**AGE**
- Under 16: 0%
- 16-18: 8%
- 19-20: 20%
- 21-22: 8%
- 23-24: 6%
- 25-26: 4%
- 27-30: 7%
- 31-35: 7%
- 36-40: 5%
- 41-45: 4%
- 46-50: 4%
- 51-60: 4%
- 61-70: 0%
- 71+: 0%

**GENDER IDENTITY**
- Woman: 64%
- Man: 35%
- In another way: 0.4%
- Not given: 0.2%

**NATIONALITY**
- UK: 86%
- EU: 7%
- NON-EU: 6%
- Prefer not to say: 1.6%
Ethical concerns and actions
Respondents say war and terrorism is the world issue they are most concerned about (54% very concerned, 36% fairly concerned). Human rights and climate change are also seen as deeply concerning. World unemployment is of least concern of the issues researched (26% say they are very concerned about this and 46% are fairly concerned).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Very concerned</th>
<th>Fairly concerned</th>
<th>Not very concerned</th>
<th>No strong views one way or another</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War and terrorism (n=2068)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights (n=2066)</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change / global warming (n=2060)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality (the gap between rich and poor people) (n=2067)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental pollution (n=2063)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child labour in poor countries (n=2058)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime and violence (n=2061)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal welfare or animal rights (n=2060)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty in poor countries (n=2059)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers being badly treated (n=2057)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lack of proper education in poor countries (n=2066)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty in the UK (n=2064)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disease and illness (n=2065)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depletion of fresh water resources (n=2063)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment (n=2075)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B1. How concerned are you, if at all about the following issues affecting the world today?
[Base: In brackets Balance: No response]
2 in 3 respondents say they already sign online petitions to address issues that concern them. Half share pages or links on social media and 45% claim to buy products with ethical credentials to address issues of concern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>I already do this</th>
<th>I don't currently do this, and would not be willing to</th>
<th>I don't currently do this, but would be willing to</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signing an online petition (n=2077)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing pages or links on social media (n=2075)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying products with ethical credentials (n=2086)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take part in an event (n=2069)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer for an organisation working on the issues (n=2082)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join a campaign group or society (n=2069)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (n=1202)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women, those from the UK and those in higher education are most likely to sign petitions, share pages on social media and buy products with ethical credentials to address their concerns.
Almost half (48%) say they are very or fairly confident that the actions they personally take could make a difference in addressing issues of concern.

International respondents from within and beyond the EU are more likely than UK respondents to be confident their actions can make a difference.

B3. How confident are you that the actions you personally can take will make a difference to addressing the issues that concern you?
[Base: 2101 Balance: No response]
Ethical purchasing
Half of respondents (51%) had made a buying decision in the last month which was influenced by ethical standards, 27% had done so in the last week.

Respondents who were postgraduates were most likely to have made a buying decision influenced by ethical standards within the last week, compared to undergraduates and those in FE.

C1. When, if at all, did you last make a buying decision that was specifically influenced by the ethical standards of a retailer or producer? [Base: 2106 Balance: No response]
1 in 5 said that ethical standards of products they buy, and the companies that sell them, matter to them a great deal. A further 45% said this mattered to them a fair amount.

C2. To what extent are the ethical standards of the products you buy and the companies that sell them an issue that matters to you?

[Base: 2106 Balance: No response]
Good quality products that are produced by workers who are treated well and are environmentally friendly are what respondents look for when buying goods that are produced in an ethical way.

C3. What motivates you to buy products that are produced in an ethical way?

- "I want to know that the producers of the products and materials that I buy are treated well and are paid properly."
- "Fair treatment of employees in all countries."
- "Equality and fair treatment of animals/humans involved in creating the products."
- "Better quality, both of the product and quality of life for the people that make them."
- "Their overall quality and how they are manufactured."
- "It’s motivating when I know if something is environmentally friendly or fair trade e.g. Coffee. My biggest concern is buying clothing as I know they are made so cheaply in horrid working conditions, so that would demotivate me."
- "It’s the best option, both environmentally, socially and morally."
- "Their overall quality and how they are manufactured."
- "They are more environmentally and labour friendly."

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national union of students
Cost is the main reason why respondents are less likely to buy ethical products – 6 in 10 say this deters them. 4 in 10 say that lack of awareness and availability of information about ethical credentials deters them from buying such products.

C4. Which of the following reasons, if any, makes you less likely to buy products that are produced in an ethical way?

[Base: 2099 Balance: No response]

- Ethical products tend to have higher prices: 60%
- Ethical options aren’t well advertised: 40%
- Information about the ethical credentials of products isn’t easily available: 40%
- Information about the ethical credentials of products isn’t reliable: 25%
- The brands I prefer don’t offer ethical options: 24%
- Ethical products tend to be lower quality: 9%
- None of these: 7%
- I’m not concerned about whether products are produced in an ethical way: 4%
- Other: 2%

Women and postgraduates are most likely to say cost and lack of promotion of ethical options prevents them from buying ethical goods.

Men are most likely to say ethical products tend to be lower quality.
90% of respondents agree that they want to buy more products that don’t harm people who produce them and 88% agree companies need to be more responsible and ethical than they are at present.

C5. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements?

[Base: In brackets Balance: No response]

- **I want to buy and use more products that don’t harm the people who produce them (n=2089)**
  - Strongly agree: 54%
  - Agree: 36%
  - No strong opinion one way or another: 9%
- **Companies need to be more responsible and ethical than they are at the moment (n=2080)**
  - Strongly agree: 52%
  - Agree: 36%
  - No strong opinion one way or another: 9%
- **It is important to me that companies are clear about where they source their raw materials, components or ingredients (n=2081)**
  - Strongly agree: 38%
  - Agree: 41%
  - No strong opinion one way or another: 16%
- **I don’t think it’s enough for companies to say that they are ethical, they need to prove it to me (n=2077)**
  - Strongly agree: 35%
  - Agree: 43%
  - No strong opinion one way or another: 17%
- **I try to buy products from companies that act in an ethical way, even if it means spending more (n=2080)**
  - Strongly agree: 15%
  - Agree: 37%
  - No strong opinion one way or another: 29%
  - Disagree: 15%

**Women and EU students are most likely to agree they want to buy more products that don’t harm the producers**
Half (52%) say they most trust accreditation marks to provide ethical credentials of products. 1 in 4 (27%) say that information from charities and campaign organisations is their most trusted source of information about the ethical credentials of products.

Women and UK respondents are most likely to trust accreditation marks.
Fairtrade awareness and purchasing
Over 9 in 10 respondents (94%) had seen the Fairtrade logo. For many Fairtrade means workers/farmers are paid a fair price for the goods they produce.

94% had seen the Fairtrade logo

“Suppliers are paid fairly for what they produce.”

“The people producing the food/products are paid a fair wage.”

“Changing the way trade works through offering better prices to farmers.”

“Fairtrade is getting value for money to pay the workers who have helped to make/grow a product.”

“Changing the way trade works through offering better prices to farmers.”

“It’s an accreditation that better supports the people who produce the product in question.”

D1. Have you ever seen this logo? [Base: 2105 Balance: No response]
D2. What do you think Fairtrade means?
Bananas are the most frequently purchased Fairtrade item 39%, saying they always buy Fairtrade bananas over those without the Fairtrade label. Fairtrade tea/coffee is always chosen by a fifth (19%), over non Fairtrade products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bananas (n=2073)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea / Coffee (n=2070)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate (n=2067)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biscuits / Cake (n=2048)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine (n=2053)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers (n=2049)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing (n=2063)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold / Jewellery (n=2048)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 in 3 respondents say they care a lot about knowing the products they buy have been grown without child labour (68%) and that farmers in developing countries get a fair deal for the products they grow (64%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>I care a lot</th>
<th>A bit</th>
<th>I am indifferent</th>
<th>I don’t care</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowing that the products you buy have been grown without child labour (n=2079)</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers in developing countries getting a fair deal for the products they grow (n=2080)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an independent third party check that brands are treating their suppliers fairly (n=2081)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers in developing countries choosing how they improve their communities with the money they earn (n=2079)</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women, UK and EU students are most likely to care about products being grown without child labour.
Fairtrade on campus
University/college and students’ union cafes and restaurants are the main places Fairtrade products are recalled as being available (mentioned by 36% and 30% respectively).

E1. Thinking about your university or college, which of the following places do you recall seeing Fairtrade products available?  
[Base: 2098 Balance: No response]
6 in 10 (59%) of respondents say that, other than on products themselves, they recall seeing the Fairtrade logo on displays in shops/cafes. A further 4 in 10 (38%) have seen the logo on posters around campus.

E2. Other than on the products themselves, where else have you seen the Fairtrade logo at your university of college?
[Base: 1600 Balance: No response]
1 in 10 recalled seeing activity during Fairtrade Fortnight. There was mixed reaction to their university / colleges performance in relation to buying products with positive ethical credentials and Fairtrade products.

11% recalled seeing any activities, campaigns or events taking place during Fairtrade Fortnight in 2016-2017.

FE students are more likely than HE students to recall seeing Fairtrade Fortnight activity.
Secondary education is where respondents were most likely to learn about accountability and ethics (32%), Consumerism, global and ethical trade (39%) and cultural diversity and equality (38%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Primary education (age 5-11)</th>
<th>Secondary education (age 11-16)</th>
<th>College (age 16+)</th>
<th>University (age 18+)</th>
<th>I've never been taught this formally but have learnt elsewhere</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental damage and protection (n=2015)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change (n=2025)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights (n=2023)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice (n=2011)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural diversity and equality (n=2021)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social responsibility / business ethics (n=2011)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism, global and ethical trade (including Fairtrade) (n=2015)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability and ethics (n=2012)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents feel their university or college could do more to support Fairtrade by promoting and selling more products and making students more aware of what it is.

"Use more fair trade products in the restaurant/shop and promote it more."

"Make it more well known if the products sold are ethically sourced as it is not widely known."

"Work with their suppliers to offer fair trade products."

"Stock fair trade goods in vending machine."

"They currently do nothing to support it, so should use it with products they make and should advertise the importance of it."

"More Fairtrade products available and clearly labelled as such (e.g. a stand with only Fairtrade products on)."

"Spreading awareness through posters, providing fair trade food options which aren't too expensive."

"Holding Fairtrade events, campaigns and becoming a Fairtrade environment."

"Hold Fairtrade events, campaigns and becoming a Fairtrade environment."

E6. What else do you think your university or college could be doing to support Fairtrade?
Local Fairtrade
6 in 10 respondents had not seen or heard about Fairtrade type activities in their local community. Of the remainder 1 in 10 were aware of Fairtrade campaign groups or Fairtrade Fortnight events.

**How can universities and colleges support local action on Fairtrade?**

- **Fairtrade campaign group**
  - 11%
- **Fairtrade Fortnight events**
  - 9%
- **Fairtrade town or city status**
  - 6%
- **Other**
  - 1%
- **Don’t know**
  - 20%
- **None of these**
  - 61%

F1. Thinking about your time at your current place of study so far, which of the following have you seen or heard about in the local community? [Base: 2068 Balance: No response]
To find out more about NUS’ research on sustainability issues, please visit: sustainability.nus.org.uk/