



Environmental information rights: classroom activities for KS3 & KS4

Young people will learn about their right to request environmental information. They will discuss information they'd like to know (about their school grounds or local environment) and explore the processes to request it. They'll make a request for this information and consider how they can use this information once received, particularly in relation to their National Education Nature Park work.

Learning outcomes

- identify useful environmental information about your school grounds
- understand there are specific laws which give everyone the right to access information
- understand the process for making a formal request for environmental information
- consider how information rights can help you be more engaged with your local area

1. Consider different types of environmental information

Pick some topical news stories about the environment. For example, water quality in rivers/seas, air quality, electric cars, declining insect population, climate change. You could supply these, learners could independently research or use the news story detailed in case study 1 (see pdf titled case studies for KS3 & KS4).

Ask learners to read the article and discuss the following questions.

- Does the article contain statistics, dates, or other information?
- How does the information support the article's argument?
- What is the article's purpose? For example, does it make the reader want to take action or change

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Green Skills



Suitable for

Key Stage 3
Key Stage 4

Location

Indoors

What you'll need

Internet access
Paper
Pens

Key vocabulary

Information rights
Laws

Suggested curriculum links

Citizenship
English
Computing
Geography

their own behaviour? Is it making them aware of something they didn't know? Is it telling them what steps could or will be taken to fix a problem?

Explain that information may create challenging emotions. It can also help to manage fears and concerns through giving us something to work on.

Ask learners:

- How does the information in your news story make you feel?
- What could you do about those feelings?

2. Identify questions to help collect useful information for your Nature Park work

Ask learners to think about the school's outdoor site. Ask them to think of questions which might help identify information to improve their understanding of it. Ask learners to record these questions. The questions will vary depending on the school site. The below questions can help prompt ideas.

- Would it be useful to know if any trees have recently been cut down at school or in your local area? Who looks after the trees at school?
- Would it be useful to know what the air quality is like where your school is? Learners might be thinking about planting a new tree, encouraging walking to school, or asking parents not to park outside the gates.
- Is there wildlife on the school site? Have there been any local studies of wildlife in your area?
- Is there a lot of new housing in the area, or being planned?
- Will the outdoor space at school need to accommodate more pupils in the future?

Write questions on a whiteboard and share with the whole class.

Ask learners to discuss whether they could research the answers to any of the questions themselves. For example:

- The Nature Park have activities for surveying wildlife and habitats on school sites. These could help answer questions about local wildlife.

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- Learners could look at the council's Local Plan. This is a strategy which sets out development aims for the area, and feeds into local planning decisions.
- Learners could look at local environmental impact studies. The town or parish council would be a good place to start.

Remove any questions learners identify from the list.

3. Understand which organisations might have the information to answer these questions

Ask learners: Who can you ask to get the answers to your questions? Encourage learners to think about who might "hold" information about roads, houses, playing fields, clean air, clean water, etc. Ask learners: Who makes decisions on these? Encourage learners to create a list of the different organisations. For example, councils, the government, energy companies, the school etc.

Explain that these are publicly funded bodies and how that is different from private businesses.

Explain the differences between central and local government. The central government makes decisions on many issues which cover the entire country, whereas local government makes decisions on issues in a local area, like a town, city or county.

Discuss the structure of local government and explain that this can sometimes be confusing.

By the end of the session learners should know:

- the name of their local town/parish council
- the name of their local authority
- that the government is made up of different departments
- DEFRA (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) is the name of the department that makes government policy about the environment.

4. Understand there are laws which give you a right to ask for information

Explain there are laws called the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). These laws mean that

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the organisations, discussed in section 3, must reply to you if you request information.

The EIR is the law which gives you a right to “access” information about the environment. FOIA is more general. It allows you to access lots of different kinds of information.

Note: KS4 may wish to research the principles behind FOI and making information public.

5. Make a request for information

Ask learners to read the questions they created in section 2. Ask them to decide which questions might help them collect useful information for their Nature Park projects. Alternatively, learners might want to find out environmental information about the wider local area.

Review the ICO’s website guidance on making a request: [How to access information from a public authority | ICO](#)

Discuss how to write a request. Learners should arrive at a point where they are ready to either devise a single request, which the teacher can send on behalf of the whole class, or at a point where each learner is ready to send their own request.

If each learner is sending their own request, try and ensure they aren’t all sending a request to the same organisation. Public bodies have limited resources and sending twenty or thirty requests on the same day may cause them issues. There are many public bodies to choose from. You may wish to split requests between local and national bodies.

Tell learners it can be helpful to explain about the background of their request and why they’re making it. It might help the organisation to direct them to relevant information which is already available.

Send the requests directly to the public body or via [whatdotheyknow.com](#) if appropriate.

6. Communicate your findings

Explain it will probably take up to 20 working days for response(s) to arrive. When they arrive, read and discuss the response(s) as a group. Ask learners to consider if they’re satisfied with them. There may be further action they need to take.

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If information has been disclosed, or you have been directed to information which is already publicly available, look at the information together (or in small groups if learners made individual requests).

Ask learners: How could you present this information to your peers? Answers could include via a poster, a webpage or an assembly. Ask learners to consider whether they could connect it with information they already have. Learners could design and present their information through their chosen method.

Ask learners: How does the information you have received link back to your Nature Park work?

Encourage learners to discuss their experience of making a request. Ask learners:

- Was it easy or difficult?
- What have you learnt?

Encourage them to consider the subject of the information request and wider learnings. This might include what they've learnt about how the country works, the variety of organisations which are funded by public money and how information rights generally work.

Ask learners: Would you make an information request again? Explain to learners there are many potential applications for these rights. As learners move into adult life, it is useful to remember that these rights exist.

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