

## Fairtrade Lancashire Schools Conference 2023



After a gap of 3 years, the fourth Fairtrade schools conference took place in County Hall on Friday 27th January. Once again the second floor became host to 65 primary school children and their teachers, from 17 schools across the county. They had come to learn more about Fairtrade and how climate change is impacting on the farmers who are growing some of our favourite foods, such as chocolate, bananas, tea and coffee. After a short address by Preston MP Mark Hendrick who introduced the topic of Fairtrade, Joanna Pollard Chair of Fairtrade Lancashire introduced a short video detailing some of these impacts. It showed how Fairtrade is helping them to cope, through schemes like better irrigation and planting different crops together, as well as providing a secure income so that they can buy the resources they need.

There was a stall from a Co-op Member Pioneer showing some of the products available from Co-op stores around the county. These include the usual bananas, chocolate and coffee but also more unusual items like tomatoes, cotton wool and wine.



The children were divided into groups and everyone then dispersed to one of 3 workshops which ran throughout the day. Susan Murphy's workshop was All About the Fairtrade Premium in which the children learned about how tea was grown and harvested and then had to put themselves in the position of the growers in deciding how to use their Fairtrade premium. The level of debate among the small groups discussing all the facts was very high and the children full of enthusiasm, before they then heard how the tea growers had in fact decided to use this community premium. The children were fully engaged in a workshop that stretched their minds and the time went far too quickly.

Fair and Funky are a duo consisting of an artist and a former primary school teacher who were therefore excellent with the children. Their workshop was called What's in Your Wallet and began with discussion about where our money goes when we shop, who gets the profits, what role we play in the supply chains and the importance of Fairtrade. To make their point and help the children carry the discussion home with them, each of them made a wallet from a recycled Fairtrade drinks carton, which really engaged them throughout.



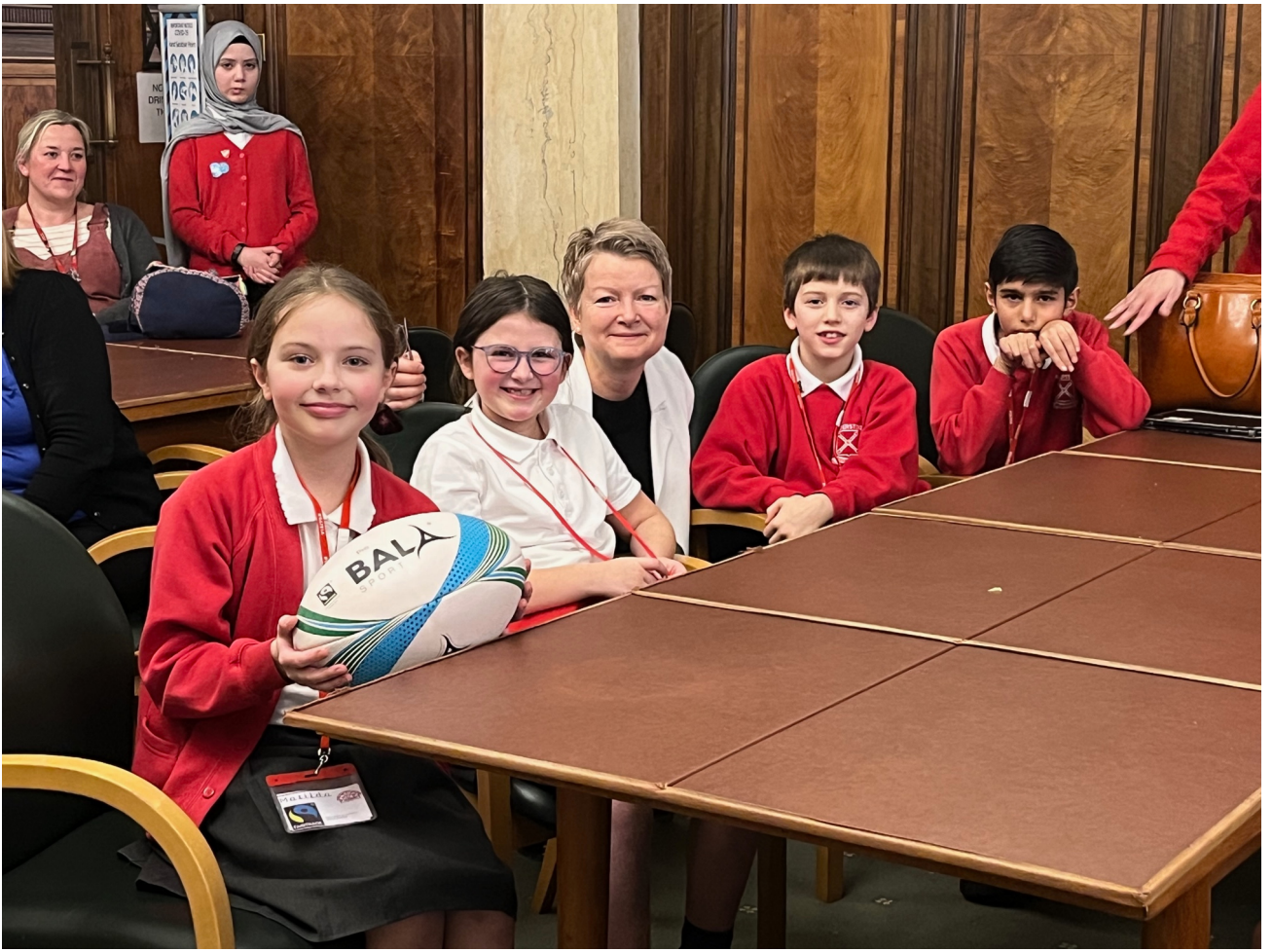
“Chocolate has a Name” was the third workshop, in which the children were treated to a vibrant talk by Adelle, originally from Ghana, whose grandmother was a cocoa farmer. With a range of artefacts ranging from artificial cocoa pods and machetes to colourful clothing and cocoa beans, she brought to life the everyday world of a cocoa farmer, and showed how the cocoa was grown and harvested. The children were shocked to learn that once it left the farm, the growers did not know what happened to it and had never tasted chocolate! Adelle and Joanna told them about the project they are working on together called “Chocolate has a Name” to introduce a curriculum based on cocoa and chocolate making workshops into Ghanaian schools for the first time. Everyone was encouraged to sign a big cocoa sack to pledge solidarity with the farmers by buying Fairtrade products whenever they could and telling other people about them. Joanna will be taking the sack with her to Ghana when she visits in April.



After lunch and when all children had participated in all the workshops, it was time to get together again for each school to evaluate their day and work out an action plan for their school for the future. Matt Oliver, former CEO of Traidcraft, who has recently set up a project to import Fairtrade football and rugby balls from Pakistan, said how much he was inspired by the children's enthusiasm and commitment, and promised to donate a Fairtrade football to each school as soon as he was able to do so. Gillian Oliver the presented a Fairtrade rugby ball to the winner of the lunch competition. This was Balderstone St Leonard's who had brought the most Fairtrade products in the lunch boxes.

Finally it was time for the distribution of certificates to each school plus "goody bags" containing lots of useful information and Fairtrade items kindly donated by Fairtrade companies such as Karma Cola, Divine Chocolate, Liberation Nuts and our very own Beech's Chocolate of Preston, which converted all its chocolate to Fairtrade earlier last year.

Thanks to Lancashire County Council for the use of County Hall and especially to Kieran Curran for facilitating the event and making sure things ran smoothly; to Lancashire Fairtrade members for all their hard work setting up the conference; to workshop leaders and helpers; and all the volunteers who were on hand to ensure everyone was where they were supposed to be at the right time, (some even masquerading as bananas!) Finally to all the children and their teachers who are the future advocates of Fairtrade. We hope their interest and enjoyment will stay with them and spur them on to further positive action and learning opportunities.



*Marjorie Drake & Anne Garsed*

for Fairtrade Lancashire

