

Becoming a travel champion

An introduction for schools and colleges

Why be a champion?

Sustrans has over 140 officers in more than 2,400 schools and colleges to help young people and staff to travel in ways which benefit their health, communities and local environment. Yet without the help of champions much of their success would be impossible.

Champions are essential to embedding active and sustainable journeys within the school or college culture. Champions are in an ideal position to effect change – they understand their school or college best and are known by the pupils, parents and staff.

An active journey is one requiring physical effort, e.g. walking, cycling, scooting and skating.

A sustainable journey includes active ones or those made by public transport e.g. bus, train, tram. If these aren't possible, car-sharing is the next best option.

This guide provides champions with the information they need to make a difference – from the skills and time requirements to the practicalities of running events and inspiring young people to travel actively.

In this guide

- What do champions do?
- Who makes a good champion?
- How much time does it take?
- Information on Sustrans' accreditation scheme, the School Mark
- Other opportunities to volunteer for Sustrans


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What do champions do?

If you are committed to active travel, and want to help generate positive changes in travel behaviour in and around your school or college, consider becoming a champion. The aim is to encourage more young people and staff to enjoy healthier journeys by bike, scooter or on foot.

Champions oversee the introduction or progress of a programme, working closely with their Sustrans officer. Here are some examples of what champions do:

- Help organise and promote regular events and activities
- Collect data including hands-up surveys and bike/scooter counts
- Engage with senior management to ensure active travel features in plans and transport policies
- Deliver assemblies or presentations
- Celebrate and reward their school or college's achievements!

Did you know?

A recent review of 14 studies concluded that 'participation in physical activity is positively related to academic performance'

Singh et al, 2012 'Physical Activity and Performance at School'

Who makes a good champion?

Champions can be teachers, teaching assistants, head teachers, governors or parents.

Being on the staff isn't a prerequisite – anyone committed to the promotion of active and sustainable travel with access to the establishment's diary and the time to undertake the role would make a good champion.

We recommend not starting out alone, and suggest having at least one other champion to support you. Sustrans has found that **working in small teams of champions is more effective**, as ideas are exchanged and the responsibility and workload are shared.

There is no set job description – **a champion's role will be diverse, interesting, challenging and rewarding!**

The essentials

- Enthusiasm
- Motivated by sustainable and active travel
- Being able to get your message across to everyone in an engaging way
- Having access to the school diary to access the timetable and make bookings (events, skill sessions, classroom elements etc)
- A willingness to commit enough time to the project

“Getting others with different skills to help and support me was important – staff in certain curriculum areas helped out with classroom teaching for example, I never did all the work myself. There were always others who shared the vision and wanted to help.”

“Since we started this Sustrans scheme, our school’s secure bicycle storage has gone from none to four (shelters). Seeing these full around the school encourages others to cycle. The programme has certainly helped to improve the facilities we offer.”

How much time will it take?

A champion’s time commitment is flexible, depending on how they plan to deliver their programme of activities and how many people are sharing the role.

Your Sustrans officer will be on hand with **guidance and tried and trusted ideas** to help you work towards your goals. Officers can also put you in touch with other champions who support each other in cluster groups.

Motivation is key

Champions are an essential motivating force, inspiring change in travel habits in the short, medium and long term.

Champions can really make a difference, helping to **create a visible legacy** that benefits the school or college community and neighbourhood for years to come.

Former champions have described their work as incredibly motivating – for themselves, for the staff, and for the pupils and students.

The Sustrans School Mark

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Sustrans' School Mark provides champions with a structure to help deliver their goals. It is a three-tiered award that recognises excellence in the pursuit and development of a school's active and sustainable travel programme.

The School Mark is currently run in over 1,000 UK schools. In almost every case the scheme is being pioneered by an enthusiastic champion who is able to see just how much the school is improving as a result.

Schools progress through Bronze, Silver and Gold levels and a certificate is awarded as they meet the criteria at each stage, as well as a digital motif to use. There is an optional plaque available to display their School Mark level.

Bronze is the 'intensively engaged' stage, with the champion working closely with their Sustrans officer to achieve the required results. As the school progresses through Silver and Gold levels, it increasingly takes the lead with the champion(s) guiding activities more independently.

Sustrans has **dedicated resources** to help schools and champions through the School Mark, including how to organise events and assemblies, run incentive schemes and engage pupils and parents. We also provide lesson plans and activities for both inside and outside the classroom, as well as run national events and challenges.

Did you know?

Elements of the Sustrans School Mark can be used to help schools meet the criteria of complementary programmes including Eco-schools and Healthy Schools.

“It is motivating to work on a prestigious national award that encourages our pupils to get out of private cars and instead to use healthier and often much quicker ways of getting to school each day.”

Become a champion today

We hope this information sheet gives you an idea of the rewards and requirements of being an active travel champion and we look forward to working with you to help make healthy, sustainable journeys part of your school or college's culture.

If you have any questions, please do speak to your Sustrans officer. You can also download free resources from our website or contact our information service, see details below.

Volunteer with Sustrans

If you are a champion and would like to become more involved with the wider Sustrans community, we recommend becoming a Sustrans volunteer. This has some great added benefits:

- newsletters and a dedicated website
- the chance to share best practice with other Sustrans volunteers
- additional training opportunities and invitations to networking events
- 20% discount at Sustrans' online shop.

If you are interested in finding out more, speak to your Sustrans officer, email volunteers-uk@sustrans.org.uk or call us on 0117 915 0110

Further information

Visit the Sustrans website www.sustrans.org.uk/youngpeople for:

- free resources and guidance, such as our guides to increasing active travel to school and working with older students, as well as further information sheets
- curriculum materials, including our Big Street Survey and Suss It Out activity sheets
- access to our free Big Shift online challenge to increase active travel
- national events, such as our annual Big Pedal competition
- details of our active travel award scheme, the School Mark
- our Superheroes skills and incentive scheme for pupils
- news and events for each of the UK regions, including sign up to our free e-bulletins

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About Sustrans

Sustrans is the charity that's enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices. Make your move and support Sustrans today. www.sustrans.org.uk

If you are interested in working with a Sustrans officer, or for enquiries about our work in educational settings and with young people, please call 0117 915 0100 or email youngpeople@sustrans.org.uk

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