

How Universities can go beyond Fairtrade: Oxford Brookes University Fairtrade debate

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As a passionate advocate of fair trade and Fairtrade, I was delighted to be invited to represent EAUC on a panel debate entitled 'How Universities can go beyond Fairtrade' at Oxford Brookes University, as part of their celebration of 10 years as the world's first Fairtrade University. The debate was held to explore how the University became the world's first Fairtrade University, how students made this happen and what the next big steps for universities should be to go beyond Fairtrade.

Chaired by the Lord Mayor of Oxford, the panel consisted of Louisa Lyne, a former Masters student who helped to achieve the status of Fairtrade University for Oxford Brookes University 10 years ago and who now works for Oxfam; . Hugo Slim, Senior Research Fellow at ELAC, who was the lecturer in charge of the Masters course at the time; . Allegra McEvedy, celebrity chef and Patron of the Fairtrade Foundation; . Jim Cranshaw, Campaigns Manager from People & Planet and myself.

The panel kicked off with a few words from Louisa about how she and her fellow students managed to achieve their aim at a time when Fairtrade was only just beginning to gain traction. There are now more than 160 Fairtrade Universities in the UK alone, but back in 2004, Oxford Brookes University had to blaze a trail. Students had to work hard to convince senior management, the catering teams and peers of the benefits of becoming a Fairtrade University. With help from the Fairtrade Foundation and support from Hugo, they accomplished their goal after 2 years of hard work and it was inspiring to hear about their journey. Hugo also gave his view of the process and stressed the importance of using the campaign as a practical tool in the Masters course, allowing the students to gain course credit through the work they did and giving them a real world experience.

Allegra shared stories from her visits to Fairtrade producers and farmers in Africa and the West Indies. Highlighting the issue of supermarket price wars on vulnerable workers in developing countries and how the Fairtrade Minimum Price can help protect them against the vagaries of global trade. Jim touched on two new campaigns that People & Planet are involved in which are looking to improve workers lives in the garment industry and the electronics industry. My presentation focussed on other elements of sustainable procurement that we at the EAUC feel are equally important as fair trade, such as cutting carbon emissions, minimising environmental impact and improving animal welfare.

After the panel had their say, the debate was opened up to the audience. Questions were then answered on changes to the Fairtrade accreditation scheme, the conflict between buying Fairtrade products and the Buy local movement and how to encourage more universities to go for Fairtrade University status.

The debate finished with Fairtrade tea, coffee and cake to celebrate the 10th birthday. Congratulations to Oxford Brookes University on reaching 10 years as the world's first Fairtrade University.

Useful links

Workers Rights Consortium – garments industry campaign

Electronics Watch – electronics industry campaign

[View the recorded debate here](#)

Kate Aubury, EAUC



Find out more about the EAUC Fair Trade CoP

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