

The **BiGGY** is an exciting new idea developed by James Derounian at the University of Gloucestershire. It would offer young people a chance to spend some 6 months or so of their Gap Year on work that supports communities, helps the environment and provides a foundation for their time at university. In return, they would receive a credit deducted from their 1st year tuition fees.

Why now?

Because:

- the Government has already introduced a *National Citizen Service* for pupils at school
- Government is committed to encouraging new forms of philanthropy via its Giving White Paper
- there is a need to enhance citizenship, and specifically to engage young people more with the community and better prepare them for adult life
- many young people find it difficult to find a job and face the prospect of paying university fees
- the 3rd sector is under greater financial pressure and needs additional resources
- there are many urgent tasks related to climate change, society and sustainability

The idea

BiGGY would be a national scheme to attract school leavers before they go to university. They would be offered work in the community, typically provided by third sector bodies, that contributes to sustainability or localism. A broad spectrum of tasks would be included in the environmental and community development fields, whilst avoiding those that are normally part of the paid economy. Projects must be intellectually and practically worthwhile for participants and valuable for the employers. Participants would not be paid for their work, but their expenses would be covered. On completion of their 6 or so months, they would receive a 'certificate of community competence' and a fee waiver/credit (say £3000- £4500) to help offset a large part of their 1st year university tuition.

The key players

To make the **BiGGY** possible, four groups must come together:

- **young people**, seeking valuable experience in sustainable, community-based projects
- the **universities**, who must be willing to take participants through the **BiGGY**
- 3rd sector & other employers, providing and managing decent quality **BiGGY** projects
- corporate and other funders, who are needed to finance a range of expenses, including the university fee waivers or credits.

Finally the scheme can only work if it is seen to have strong government support. The Universities and Civil Society Ministers have both expressed interest in the proposal.

Next steps

Staff at the University of Gloucestershire are keen to develop the **BiGGY** to a stage where it could be ready for national roll out. This requires two stages of work, for which funding is sought:

1. a thorough **feasibility study** to explore the idea, identify opportunities and challenges involved in developing it, costing and developing detailed proposals for a pilot scheme run by the University
2. to be followed by a **pilot scheme**, which could focus on work in Gloucestershire and offer say 100 places at the University for those seeking deferred entry to higher education in 2014