

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

# GREENWASHING & TRANSPARENCY

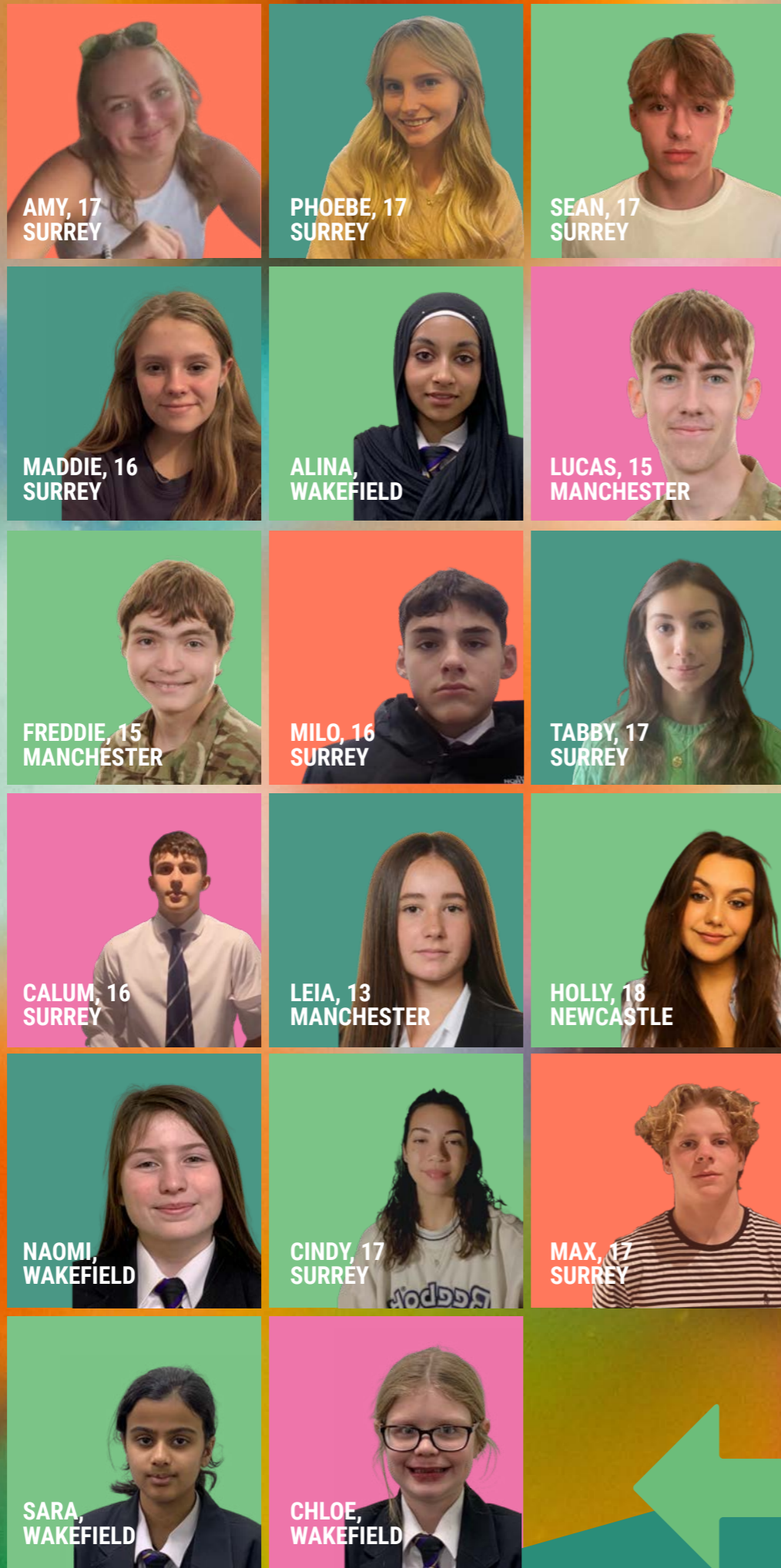


TRANSPARENCY



THE FUTURE FOOD MOVEMENT  
**youTh**  
ADVISORY BOARD  
AMPLIFYING YOUNG VOICES

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD



# INTRODUCTION

The Youth Advisory Board is made up of seventeen school-aged children from all over the UK who believe in the Future Food Movement vision and meet monthly to discuss and advise on the future of food as they see it. They discuss issues such as packaging, biodiversity, Net Zero and greenwashing.

As one of the largest emitting sectors, the food industry's opportunity to deliver on ambitious climate transition plans presents exciting careers for young people. The FFM Youth Advisory Board will bring together the future generation and the food industry to explore what young people think food businesses need to do to tackle the climate crisis, and help the food industry better manage its impact and produce climate-smart food.

Young people are worried about the future and are looking to leaders of industry to use their power for good. The Youth Advisory Board gives young people a voice on the issues affecting the food system in today's world. It allows our Business Members to hear from and connect directly with young people, providing them with ideas and insights to inspire them and challenges to make them think differently.

 <p><b>FFM YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING DATES</b> EXCLUSIVE TO BUSINESS MEMBERS</p>	<p><b>16<sup>TH</sup></b> MAY</p> <p>Greenwashing &amp; Transparency</p>	<p><b>27<sup>TH</sup></b> JUNE</p> <p>Healthy &amp; Sustainable Diets</p>	<p><b>14<sup>TH</sup></b> NOVEMBER</p> <p>Net Zero Food Systems</p>
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# GREENWASHING & TRANSPARENCY

The Youth Advisory Board met again to discuss greenwashing and transparency. The meeting started with an introduction to greenwashing. Specifically, what it is and some ways in which a company might implement it within its marketing and communications.

Greenwashing, also called “green sheen”, is when a company makes unsubstantiated, or misleading claims about a company’s or products’ green-credentials. This could be claims within, advertising, marketing, communications or packaging, that are deceptively used to persuade the public that the organisation’s products, aims and policies are environmentally friendly, when the company is not, or may not be, making any notable sustainability efforts.

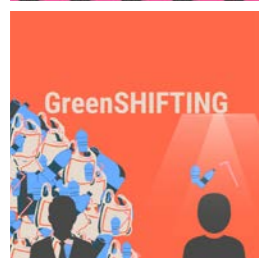
## TYPES OF GREENWASH



**GreenCROWDING**  
Relies on hiding within a crowd of other companies to avoid discovery. The business might be setting “green” targets but will be moving forward at the slowest possible pace.



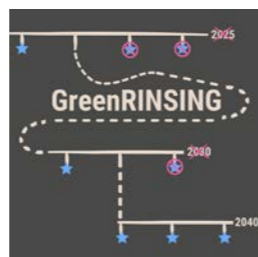
**GreenLIGHTING**  
Drawing attention to eco-friendly practices to distract from less environmentally friendly activities.



**GreenSHIFTING**  
Implying that the consumer or customer is at fault for not making environmentally friendly choices. In effect, ‘shifting the blame’



**GreenLABELLING**  
Calling something “green” or “sustainable” on the label, when in reality the claim could be misleading.



**GreenRINSING**  
Setting ambitious environmental targets but then changing or revising them before they can be achieved.



**GreenHUSHING**  
Announcing sustainable goals and then staying quiet or hiding any progress.

“ Greenwashing is never a good thing, as it is deception. If I found out a company was guilty of greenwashing, I wouldn’t be shocked as it is a marketing tactic companies use to boost profits and improve their outlook.

But, I would feel naive and think that I should have been aware of it beforehand.

CALUM

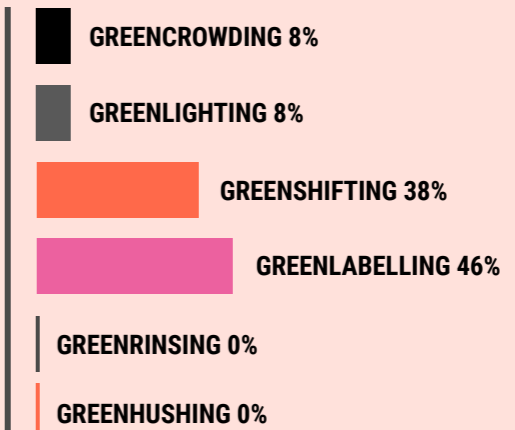




# THE PERCEPTION OF GREENWASH

## WHAT IS THE WORST TYPE OF GREENWASH?

The Board discussed the different types of greenwashing and voted on which type they believed to be the worst. Just under half the attendees voted that shifting the blame to consumers, by implying the fault lies with them is the worst type that a company could be guilty of, but the biggest area of concern was making misleading on-pack claims.



“

I think a lot of companies will use the greenlighting strategy to cover up what they are doing. Tricking their customers into thinking that they are neutralising the playing fields by doing something slightly better for the environment, but the activity might not be equal to how much they're taking away from the environment.

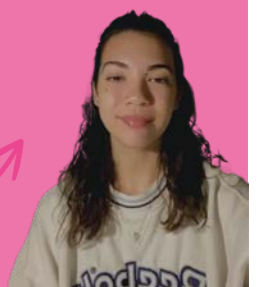
**MAX**



“

Labelling something as something it isn't, gives customers a false representation of the company.

**CINDY**



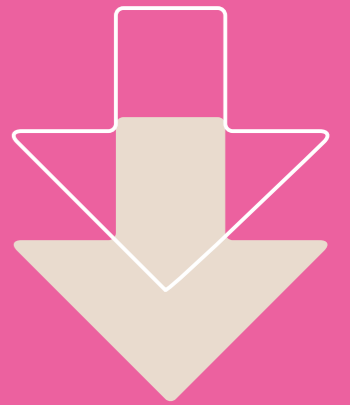
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I think that the greenshifting is the worst type of greenwashing because you're putting the blame on somebody else, even though your contribution as a company has caused a lot of the main problem.

**NAOMI**







### COULD GREENWASHING EVER BE A GOOD THING?

The Board discussed some possible motivations for greenwashing, agreeing that the most likely motive was financial gain. They did not provide any circumstance in which it was acceptable for companies to knowingly mislead consumers through their communication.

### HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOU FOUND OUT A COMPANY WAS GREENWASHING?

The general consensus of the Board was that they would actively stop supporting companies that were found to be greenwashing, as making false claims would make them feel uncomfortable, deceived and disappointed. Using misleading marketing, makes companies look like they have more to hide, and may be more damaging to reputation than simply not making the claim in the first place.



Making bold claims could be useful if you want to grow your company. You might temporarily focus on boosting products that everyone really likes, which generates enough money to help you make more eco-friendly products in your range that are actually better for the planet, but they're not getting the money or attention.

But I don't think this is a good thing, because really it's just lying and you're getting money from people that don't know that you're lying to them.

NAOMI



When companies lie about what they are doing, it is likely to put pressure on other companies to attempt to complete environmentally friendly activities that they may not have undertaken otherwise.

TABBY



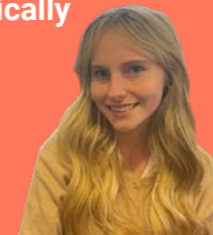
Some companies may be making some headway in the right direction, but exaggerate in their communication to conceal the lack of progress.

LEIA



If I found out a company was greenwashing, I would stop buying from them. It is technically scamming consumers.

PHOEBE



Products that are found to be profiting from greenwash should change, and the company should pay a big fine.

CHLOE



I'd spread awareness about the particular company greenwashing and do more research in future.

SEAN





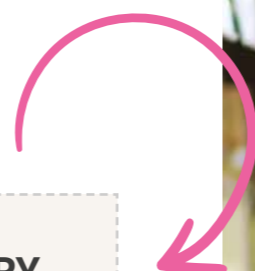
# TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

DO YOU THINK THAT GREENWASH IS EASY TO SPOT?



**ALL BOARD MEMBERS BELIEVE THAT GREENWASH IS VERY DIFFICULT TO SPOT**

They don't think that many people would look to substantiate claims that are made by companies and are likely to believe what they are told.



Companies might create a range of 'sustainable' products, promoted as being eco-friendly. We've seen similar examples in the fashion industry where products were found not to actually be sustainable.

To trust what a company is saying, look for key words in the product description. I think you can tell when a company is genuinely passionate about being sustainable, so I'd be more likely to trust that.

**AMY**



I don't think many people would look into information, they'd just believe it. For example, if something says it's recyclable, you think it's recyclable.

**CHLOE**



I think companies spend a lot of time and effort into finding ways to cover it up.

**MAX**

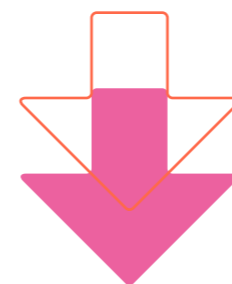


I feel like big companies use it to their advantage, to get customer's money and to make more profit. They have a lot of power in these situations and are easily able to hold things back and not make them as obvious.

**CINDY**







### CAN YOU ALWAYS TRUST DATA?

We asked whether the Board thought that data is always something that can make you trust in a company's marketing or advertising.

The Board agreed that when looking at statistics derived from surveys, they'd be looking to see how credible the source was and also how many people were asked. They suggest a legitimate figure would be based on data captured from over 1,000 people, but the more the better.


“  
I look for clear statements on packaging that are easy to prove. For example, this bottle is made from x% recycled plastic.”

**CALUM**



“  
I wouldn't a hundred percent trust statistics, because I don't know where companies are getting them from and anyone can make those statistics up. I would have to research it to see how they formulated their information.”

**CINDY**



**FFM COMMENT**

Right now, the Board think that many customers accept claims made by businesses at face value. They also feel that companies owe it to the consumer to make information simple and to be honest with their claims. There is a risk, with so many greenwashing stories coming to the fore, and statistics, claims and data sources being discredited, that consumers will begin to distrust the information they are given, with some of the Board feeling the pressure to validate claims. This would give rise to an argument for standardised eco-labelling and reporting.



## WHAT DOES THE BOARD TRUST?

- Sara and Tabby trust the FairTrade logo on packaging in the supermarket.
- Chloe and Alina talked about looking out for green logos that depict leaves or plants.
- Calum would buy into a business that is Net Zero, so he doesn't feel he is having a negative effect on the environment, and suggested that companies show the carbon footprint of products on the labels.
- Leia thinks that using third-party accreditation helps to validate products, providing it is a reliable source. Some examples of logos that would make her trust a product are FSC, Wildlife Trust or Red Tractor.
- Brands came out quite strongly with the Board stating that if they know, respect and trust the brand, they would accept products claiming to be 'eco-friendly' at face value. The Board also said specifically that branded vegan products, may indicate that a product is better for the environment.



## WHAT DOES THE BOARD THINK IS SUSPICIOUS?

- Phoebe thinks that when companies overuse 'no-this' or 'no-that', she would be suspicious over how good the product would actually be.
- Holly thinks it's very hard to trust any claims because, as a consumer, you never fully know the truth. "For a company to reassure me that what they were saying was the truth, I would be expecting them to be fully transparent. This would be better than having a more hidden agenda."
- Sean thinks that "over-exuberant information can raise suspicion."
- Amy explained that vague, blanket statements such as "made using sustainable products" would raise an alarm for her.
- Leia agreed that it becomes more suspicious when people use the word 'green'. "It is overused and now I am unsure of the reality of it."



## WHOSE OPINION WOULD YOU TRUST?

The Board then discussed who key messages should be communicated by, in order to make them the most trustworthy. Whilst considering a company's CEO and employees to be trusted, two thirds of the Board would trust external experts or customers the most. External experts were identified as the most popular source for trust and validation of a company's credentials; no one believed that adverts, marketing or packaging could grant this verification. Every response identified a person as the best point of trust.



I'd trust the reviews and recommendations from other customers who have bought the product. Because they had the experience, I would trust them more because they wouldn't really lie.

**SARA**



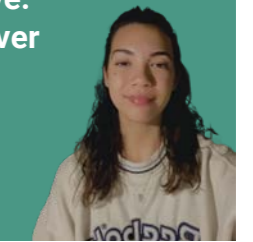
External experts should have complete transparency and not set out to protect the brand like internal members.

**SEAN**



I'd trust an external expert or someone with an outside perspective. Getting another person or another company's viewpoint on whatever it is that the business is saying or selling. However, if I found out that that expert was paid by the company - I feel it would give me more reason to not be able to trust the business.

**CINDY**





# HOW CAN YOU AVOID GREENWASHING?

The Board discussed how companies may avoid greenwashing. As could be expected, the most common word used in response was 'honesty'.

The Board think that greenwashing is mainly present when a company's main focus is making money, but where 'purpose' is more ingrained as a part of the business values, green claims are more likely to be genuine, and not greenwash.



Companies could publicly express their products reduced impact on nature via social media and clearly label the product as being environmentally friendly. I think there should be stricter rules from the government on false branding or lies, with harsh penalties.

**TABBY**



Rather than making unsubstantiated claims, companies should show proof and evidence of how they are acting in eco-friendly ways. This would be more believable for consumers.

**PHOEBE**



You can look online to see companies and see whether they actually do what they say they are doing.

**CINDY**



For companies to avoid greenwashing they need to be transparent about their products and how they are accomplishing their sustainability targets. Being transparent would gain respect and trust from consumers.

**CALUM**



Companies should have clear science-based and achievable targets.

**LEIA**



**DEEPER DIVE & FFM INSIGHT**

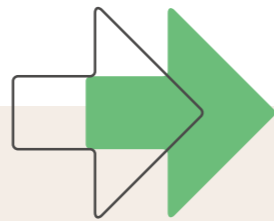
We asked the Board to vote on whether they thought companies should set smaller, targets that they would definitely be able to achieve, or bigger, ambitious targets that they could potentially fall short of. Every member, except one, stated that it was better to set smaller targets.

A interesting watch out for companies when building roadmaps, the Board expect businesses to be doing the right things, but they expect them to be pragmatic in the way they set out to achieve them, considering all the implications and being totally open about their progress.



# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FOOD BUSINESSES?

The Youth Advisory Board issues a big call for transparent communications as well as proof that a company is walking the talk. They expect companies to set smaller realistic targets each year and to demonstrate what they are doing and why. They universally agreed that companies knowingly engaging in greenwash are acting in a deceitful way, and that would impact their opinion of the business and its products. Here is the action the Board would like businesses to take:



- BE HONEST:**  
 Ask yourselves whether what you want to communicate is driven by your company purpose and values or financially incentivised.
- BE CLEAR:**  
 On packaging, use simple, but specific messages and recognised, trusted third party logos where you can. Avoid vague words such as green or eco friendly, and opt for words that talk to consumers.
- BE REALISTIC:**  
 Set targets that you believe you can achieve and be pragmatic in the way you set out to achieve them.
- BE OPEN:**  
 Have data and evidence to back up any claims, and make this accessible to shoppers. Advocate for your company from the Board, through to employees, and use trusted external people of influence and reputable third parties to spread your message.
- BE AUTHENTIC:**  
 Build meaningful relationships: If shoppers trust you, they'll accept what you tell them, but trust is fragile, so don't take advantage of this.



## WHAT THE BOARD WANTS TO KNOW FROM CEOs



How do you demonstrate that your promises of eco-friendly behaviour are true?

Are you able to give reasons and justification for the decisions your company makes, and the impacts of those decisions?

How can you change your company values and practices to become more sustainable?

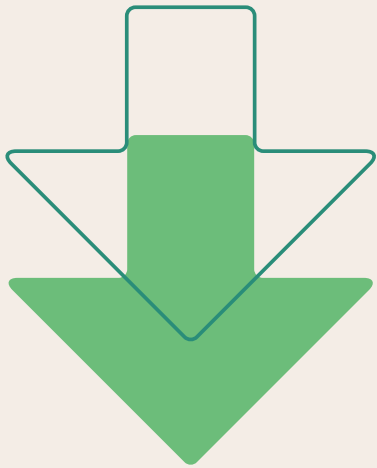
Would you be willing to provide regular updates on how your company is doing against its climate goals and would you be open to taking opinions from the consumers?

What evidence do you have to prove that you're not greenwashing?



What measures do you have in place to be 100% sure about how your products are sourced and made?





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