

Democracy Now!



Welcome to the first issue of Resolve, a journal written for and by the People & Planet network. Strong campaigns need good analysis, which in turn depends upon us engaging in lots of healthy debate as a network. We hope this journal will animate more minds and keyboards for years to come! Feel free, by the way, to suggest a better name since those of us behind the journal lack a linguistic imagination!

Democracy, education and astute political analysis are three values central to the People & Planet network. Yet according to the authors in issue we are missing opportunities to engage with them, making our campaigns less effective and our network less principled as a result. Could we enact some small reforms or even mobilise the entire network through decentralised internet technologies? Should we be more overtly anti-capitalist and can we understand our campaigns in a wider context? Have a read and let your thoughts loose in group meetings and the network web forums.

Finally, with the academic year coming to a close far-sighted groups will inevitably have the next freshers' fayre on their minds. So a fresher has written some thoughts on what makes a good stall to kick off what will hopefully be a fruitful discussion there too!

About the journal

This journal is written and edited by students and staff in the People & Planet network. We welcome any unsolicited articles and help editing. Our editorial policy is to publish anything and everything we're sent, so long as it's not obviously libellous and it's readable. Don't worry if you're not a PhD student, just be interesting!

The journal is available online, where you can browse the articles. Create an account to leave comments and submit your own articles:

www.pandpnetwork.dreamhosters.com/journal

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- Tom, editor-at-large

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Democracy as a core value

By Anne-Marie O'Reilly and Tom Dale (Oxford)

We believe that democracy is People and Planet's core value. We want to build a more democratic world, and want to do so while practising, and involving ourselves in, a participatory democracy. There is still a vast amount of scope for increasing democracy in the network; currently, the organisation is falling significantly short of being truly student-led. In this article we present some preliminary suggestions as to how P&P can work to be more democratic. We hope that other network members will have their own thoughts, and that over the next few years we can work together towards a more vibrant, effective and democratic network.

But first we feel it is important to restate some key benefits of a democratic network. Students become more empowered, and our knowledge and insights will shape the campaigns we run. The more we engage in discussions about fundamental organisational and political questions, the more a culture of radical analysis will emerge to inform our action. As we argue in a companion article in this issue, this is essential if we are to realistically tackle problems we care about.

The Management Committee

The sovereign body of People & Planet is the management committee (MC). Its decisions have significant implications for the nature of the network since it oversees resource allocation for all areas of the support office's work and approves the overall organisational strategy. The committee is composed of six representatives from NGOs and six students who are elected by the network at the forum, as well as the director of People and Planet. This is intended to ensure that students have key input into important decisions. There are, however, several ways in which the decisions it makes could be made more democratic:

- If People and Planet is to be student-led, in theory students should be in a majority on the MC. At the moment only about three or four students usually attend, which means that student input into organisational decisions can be minimal. This should be tackled by electing a higher number of students to the committee; if current attendance rates are an indicator, ten elected representatives would be required to ensure a majority.

- The representative role of student members should be clarified: they should actively seek the opinions of the network and it should be possible for the network to recall any member of the MC through appropriate structures.
- The minutes of the meetings should be published on the website in an accessible format, so that the network is aware of what is being discussed, and people can contact their elected representatives to make sure their views are heard.
- Students should be empowered to bring proposals to MC and contribute to discussions with confidence. This will require greater contact between the office and MC members (such as was proposed by last year's working group on democracy). More than the current four meetings a year might be required to ensure that every important organisational decision can be properly addressed.

The Forum and beyond

Currently the scope of democracy at the forum is very limited: it is used for consultations on existing and prospective campaigns, according to terms and a timetable set by the management team (which is composed of senior office staff). Fundamental issues about the direction of P&P – such as those contained in this article – are not raised as a matter of course at Forums. The recently implemented system, whereby the network can make campaign proposals to be considered at the forum and a working group including students short-lists them, is a step in the right direction. However, since this is the key democratic event for the network, much deeper reforms are desirable. For instance:

- The agenda should be set by students. Groups should be able to bring motions/topics to the forum and those that could not be discussed at the forum could be forwarded to the Management Committee.
- A student working group, in consultation with the office, should set the final timetable.
- Opportunities for dialogue should be extended beyond the forum. Working groups, including students, which are accountable to the network should be involved in the more detailed working out of decisions reached at the forum.

The Office

The democracy working group that reported last year did not address internal office democracy. However, if as a network we really care about empowerment and democracy, shouldn't this be reflected in our internal structures as well?

Currently, no interns or permanent staff (other than the director) from the central office sit on management committee. Staff, who are most aware of organisational issues, only have input into major decisions through the office management consultation structures. The risk of this approach is that what goes forward from those discussions is filtered through the perspectives of the management team (who run P&P day-to-day), so that perspectives of fundamental importance to the direction People and Planet takes could be lost.

Serious thought should be given to what structures should be adopted in the office: one possibility would be that P&P became a legally constituted as a democratic workers' co-op – a body which is managed (and often owned) by its workers, meaning that they would discuss and vote on issues, and perhaps have a say over appointments. There should be a minimum of two staff members on the management committee, at least one of whom is an intern.

Money and Democracy

People and Planet needs money to operate, to sustain the events where members take decisions and to support campaigning. But we have to be aware that the way in which P&P fundraises is fundamental. There are certain fundraising trends that could seriously change the nature of the network. It is important that these are discussed clearly and that we democratically decide on the direction the organisation pursues rather than realising in ten years time that People and Planet has lost its unique identity and it not the organisation we would have wanted it to be.

Corporate funding

The plans to seek funding from 'corporates' may lead in a direction which compromises the network. While currently such fundraising is within fairly strict guidelines, dependence on corporate funding could gradually lead to seeking funds from companies that do not fit the restricted 'ethical' categories. This could mean we face a difficult debate in future: keep our principles or cut activity. More worryingly, if the changes are gradual, these issues might not come up

for debate and the network could be radically altered without explicit consideration. For this reason, it is important that we take heed of possible trends now, and make sure that we make our decisions accordingly.

6th Form Funding Constraints

It is much easier to get money to work with 6th Form than University students (which can be pitched as related to the government's 'citizenship' agenda). This means that considerations about what constitutes a viable project are constrained by assumptions about what is 'suitable' for 6th Form groups. Significant P&P resources are being put towards looking at how are work can fit curriculum requirements. It is important to ask ourselves: are we happy to have more of a focus on active citizenship than radical campaigning? To do the former probably isn't a bad thing, but there are plenty of other organisations that do it – should P&P lose its uniqueness and become another?

It is important that the network is aware of and able to respond to these issues. The situation is unlikely ever to be ideal, but there are several ways in which we could address fundraising constraints on democracy:

- There are many skilled graduates and undergraduates in the network who are capable of undertaking research into new campaigns. Many groups have run independent campaigns, acquiring skills and knowledge that could be shared with the network. Developing ways in which the office can facilitate network communication and support these campaigns is essential if the network is to ensuring campaigns are student-led, and we are campaigning as effectively as possible.
- Currently, if P&P groups fundraise, the majority of the money is given to other charities. However, if we believe that campaigning for structural change with P&P is the most effective way of working for a better world, isn't resourcing P&P also important? It is unlikely that P&P could ever be entirely self-sufficient, drawing its funds solely from the network without severely jeopardising the amount of work that students can put into campaigns. However, significant steps in this direction are really important if we want our network to be democratic.
- It may be that if external fundraising trends lead in a direction that is not consistent with our vision of the organisation, we could make the decision to accept less resources in exchange for greater focus and integrity. Several other NGOs

are currently developing university and sixth form projects; if we lost our distinctiveness as a student-led, radical, democratic network then it's not clear that it would be necessary for P&P to continue as an organisation.

Clarifying democratic processes

The division of power between the Management Committee, the office Management Team, the Forum, working groups, office staff and the People and Planet Trust needs to be clarified and the extent to which it is democratic must be assessed. Several examples illustrate the importance of this:

- Several Scottish groups are keen to establish a Scottish support office in order to respond to Scotland's unique campaigning, fundraising and educational opportunities. Even if they were able to fundraise to establish this post themselves, it is not clear what process would be required in order for this to be approved by the support office. There is a tension between group autonomy and demands on office resources that result when groups pursue their own projects.
- The Management Team decided certain things were beyond the remit current organisational strategy. For example, that 'campaigning will continue to address global issues, not student-specific or local issues'.
- Apart from the fact that the distinction between global and local issues is far from clear given the local impacts of the global economic system, this limits the scope of democratic decisions at forums in the future.
- A clarification of existing processes and a commitment to developing a more student-led, democratic structure is essential.

Conclusion

This probably seems like a pretty dry document, given that it's intended to pursue a vision of a radical, empowering and democratic student movement. However, if we are committed to changing the world in participatory and empowering ways, then the structures People and Planet adopts are key and it is important, that we, as network members, are aware of and responsible for them.

There are lots of things we as a network can do now:

We should share our thoughts as a network! Join the online forum and start some discussions. Organise

regional days of workshops which bring together different political and strategic perspectives and allow time for discussion. Contribute to this journal.

Share our resources and skills on our independent campaigns with other groups - the key organiser's mailing-list, the forum, and hopefully by the start of the next academic year, the P&P website are key ways of doing this!

Speak to your regional reps, interns and office staff about your thoughts on democracy in the network, and come to next year's Shared Planet conference and Forum armed with lots of ideas about how you think democracy in the network should work.

Storming the gates: Democratising People & Planet on the internet?

By Tom Chance (Reading)

Democracy is one of People & Planet's core values, yet for many annual consultation exercises and informal feedback fall far short. P&P is better than most with its grassroots focus, but most of the communication and decision making still emanates from the support office. Web forums, mailing lists, wikis and other internet-based tools are often brought up as potential solutions. But whilst they can help facilitate mass communication across the network, they are also profoundly undemocratic in many ways.

First it's important to understand how the internet might fit into existing P&P structures. There are, I think, two central principles at play: stand aside and consultation.

At the moment things are fairly laissez-faire, with the "stand aside" principle allowing groups to choose which campaigns they run and how to run them. Being part of the P&P network can just mean getting resources in the post and nominally running one of the campaigns, even if your focus is far more radical/reformist. So in one sense, so long as the support office continue to send you the goods it really doesn't matter what they do.

The other principle is consultation. Every year representatives from groups gather at the Forum to give the office feedback and, if funding allows, change the broad direction or even the subject of the three

campaigns. Even if students get a free vote, e.g. for a completely new campaign, the support office go off and work out the details with (so far as I can tell after four years) little student participation. The next year a new crop of students get to feed back again. This process seems to have pretty good results, going by the success of campaigns and the lack of serious dissent in the network.

So hand in hand, these two principles keep most people happy. The support office know roughly what the network wants and can get on with producing quality materials. The network can get on with campaigning and enjoy the support of the office when needed. But there are undoubtedly problems, as is evident at every Forum, where sessions overrun and some students get frustrated with the constraints of the consultation exercises.

Democracy requires continuous participation

One big problem with democracy by consensus is that it takes time. Participants need time to understand the issues under discussion, to develop their own perspective through solitary reflection and social debate. Whilst the support office do send out a consultation document in advance of the Forum, it can be difficult to get good discussions going on your own group, especially if you mostly agree, which may be the case given the months or years that you will have spent working together. Moreover, you have little or no idea what the rest of the network thinks, so your own perspective will be pretty limited.

When representatives finally turn up the the Forum they're thrown into a lightning debate and expected to find a common platform in about an hour! Perspectives clash, commonalities can be difficult to draw out. Good facilitation usually ensures that most people get their say, but that's hardly the same as the kind of thorough discussion that will produce really good decisions.

Wouldn't it be better if we were discussing the issues as a network all year round? Wouldn't the Forum run much more smoothly, and be far more democratic, if it was the culmination of these discussions rather than a rapid consultation exercise? To many it seems crazy that we don't take these discussions onto the internet.

Reinforcing undemocratic norms

Would this be better? Well, possibly. The problem is that both the Forum and the internet tools have

undemocratic aspects. Both take time, energy and money to participate; intense discussions favour the most engaged, knowledgeable, energetic people; groups that depend upon the support office the most have more motivation to get involved, but are more likely to lack the resources (including people) to participate; with the internet in particular, bored students and internet addicts can hijack discussions in the course of an afternoon, unable to resist responding to that latest forum post or email.

For these kinds of discussions to be remotely democratic, uni/school groups need strong internal democracy, so that the group as a whole is being well represented on the internet and at the Forum. Then participants need to exercise a good deal of self-restraint, working as much at including other people as at expounding their own views. Otherwise discussions and decisions will simply reflect the perspectives of those active, resource rich, knowledgeable activists. To an extent the consultation approach moderates this by restricting the power of participants, but that's hardly an ideal solution!

A more radical application of stand-aside

One alternative to replacing consultation with direct democracy on the internet is an extension of the stand-aside principle. The internet may be a rubbish tool for facilitating discussions and decision making processes, but it's a great way for people to organise and mobilise. We have enough time, energy and expertise across the network to organise our own fantastic campaigns. Fed up with Fairtrade? Get behind the No Sweat solidarity campaign! If you're unhappy with the direction of the AIDS/HIV campaign then suggest a new one.

Most groups will continue to need the support office, so democracy within this structure is important. Tom and Anne-Marie's article outlines several issues and ways of addressing the current shortcomings. But ultimately the internet will be much more useful at building another sphere of discussion, another kind of democracy. We should be building these spaces and looking for ways to improve our work without turning our noses up at the support office and the Forum, but without depending on them either.

The new P&P web site now allows more interaction from students, but its development and nature just reinforces the vertical hierarchy that the internet could avoid. When they were developing it we were barely consulted, despite the enormous experience and interest within the network. Now it's up - and what a cool

improvement it is! - we still have the same model of static, support office-managed pages with limited opportunities for us to add content through staff moderation.

We finally have a web forum and journal for the grassroots, developed without and now promoted by the support office. But it's hardly making the full use of the technology!

Contrast this with grassroots networks that evolved on the internet. When Howard Dean stormed the US Democratic presidential primaries in 2004 his slogan was simple: "You have the power!" His campaign team used the internet to cede control to the grassroots at every opportunity, devolving power by handing the tools over and letting the network of pro-Dean activists create the content. They could organise meetups, post blog entries, discuss strategy and more. The campaign was so successful that "Dean Corps" groups appeared, undertaking low-intensity community work such as cleaning up riverbanks, reading to children and collecting food for homeless people.

We could have a national web site that provides the support office's content, but also a section that each uni/school group would have complete control over. Forums, blogs, file upload spaces, wikis, news, photo galleries, anything groups wanted, so long as somebody in the network could implement it. An editorial team, comprising of students and support office staff, could select content that would "float up" from group web sites to provide an overview of regional news, Go Green resources from across the network - really any combination of content imaginable. All of this is technically possible today.

None of this would solve the democracy issue. But it might help strengthen existing democratic structures by facilitating ongoing discussion, and it would create a new space for "stand-aside" democracy to really empower the grassroots. It remains to be seen what the network as a whole has the resources to implement, what the support office will support, and whether the grassroots will take control.

Time to get political!

By Anne-Marie O'Reilly and Tom Date (Oxford)

We all agree that "People & Planet is a student network working to create a more just and sustainable world by campaigning on poverty, human rights and the environment". But isn't it somewhat worrying that, according to its current rhetoric, the Conservative party

could declare common cause with us? Whatever the level of cynicism behind the new Conservative approach, the fact remains that everyone recognises some level of injustice and unsustainability in our world. Our common identity should come from a particular analysis of the factors that create the situation and the actions we can take to tackle them.

This call for cohesion doesn't mean we give up our group autonomy or become an elite organisation; it's great that groups disagree and that people can engage in campaigns at lots of different levels. The space to be creative and explore our own answers is allowed and is essential if the forum is to be a democratic event. That people can engage with our campaigns at any level means that we do not become exclusive, and people are likely to be drawn into deeper understanding as their engagement increases.

But what understanding? We feel that there is a distinct lack of political analysis and discussion throughout the network.

None of us believe that we can change the world by good will alone, so we need to have a relatively good understanding of the issue we are campaigning on. But it's questionable whether an issue-based analysis really equips us with the materials we need to actually change the world. P&P campaigning was issue-based in the run up to the G8 - we addressed Trade, AIDS and Climate Change. But the lack of commitment to tackling trade injustice and climate change at the G8 seems attributable to one factor: it is not in the political interests of the world's most powerful leaders to actively tackle these problems, neither is it in the interests of the corporations who underpin their economies and mount powerful lobbies on these issues.

That we won the AIDS campaign was great, but it was a relatively easy concession for them to make. Two days into the G8 meeting America reneged on committing to universal access to AIDS treatment by 2010. By the time the commitment was reinstated, guess what? there was no time to make further progress.

This suggests that if we are genuinely committed to changing the world we need to try and understand the interests and power relations at work, not just the factors relating to a given issue. Is it the case that we could never have achieved success on trade justice or climate change, and if so what would be a more effective use of our time? If we don't have any answers, we should be honest about the fact we need to work some out. Then we need to dedicate some time to doing just that.

In a [pamphlet](#) a few members of Oxford P&P put together we argued that power and incentives can often be shown, by examination of issues such as AIDS, climate change and world-trade, to be strongly distributed according to the structure of international capital. If we take it that groups of people within this structure, depending on their position in it, have differing power and interests, then we posit classes. So our analysis of the world will involve analysis of the current global economic system: capitalism.

This isn't to suggest that we need to fall headlong into the culture and practise of the 'anti-capitalist movement'. It too has its problems: in the UK, the anarchist movement is characterised by a lack of willingness to develop an analysis and therefore an effective strategy for change. However, once the need for understanding the world is recognised, we need to recognise the importance of reflection on how we go about changing things as well. We should consider all options: working with electoral parties, the importance of the labour movement, and so on.

One thing we can be certain of is this: whatever our solution is, it will necessarily have to involve power. Power should not be crudely understood, and there are many different ways of having power ([J.K. Galbraith](#) talked about personality, property and organisation, [Hannah Arendt](#) talked of 'communicative power'). But if we have agreed that there are powerful interests with pernicious interests, persons whose interests and power arise from their relation to the structure of society in general, then we cannot hope to finally countervail against them without being able to resist their projects, and establish ones of our own.

The autonomous structure of groups in the P&P network means that we have the freedom and capacity to think hard about an analysis and putting it into practise. And the democratic structure of the network means the outcome of our discussions can feed directly into the work the office does to support us. So to conclude: we must understand the world in order to change it. And here are a few thoughts about what will be necessary for P&P to do so:

For groups

Groups need to ensure that their campaigning activities are informed by rigorous discussion of what they hope to achieve, how, and whether this is the most effective use of their time. We shouldn't feel guilty about dedicating more time to discussion, it is important if we are to be effective. Some suggestions of ways to go about this include:

- Regional days where issues are debated, alternative political analyses examined and our own proposals are developed.
- Talks by a wide range of speakers (drawn from beyond the NGO-world) followed by discussions at a few meetings a term.
- We could set up reading groups, or watch radical films to inform discussion.

For the network as a whole

As a network, we need to encourage a discursive culture and share our ideas with each other:

- This journal is one excellent way groups can contribute to an ongoing, in-depth discourse.
- Everything can be discussed on the [network web forum](#).
- We should set aside time at Shared Planet, the Summer Gathering and the Forum to work out bases of consensus on which we wish the office and the network to operate.

For the office

The office should also take responsibility for moving in this direction:

- It should facilitate communication between groups.
- It should encourage a discursive culture in the network by offering workshops and opportunities for discussion on different political analyses.
- Its literature should address the following:
- Disadvantaged people in the Global South/Majority World are political agents, and our solidarity with them should be such as to recognise and encourage this.
- Action or inaction which is calamitous for large sections of humanity does not just happen. It happens because for other (generally speaking, smaller, wealthier) sections of humanity the action or inaction is beneficial. We should try to identify who benefits, and how it is that they have the power that they do.
- We should further seek to identify why it is that these people have the interests they do, and also why they have the power to, so frequently, achieve their will.
- At the moment, the office's strategy commits it to working solely on 'global, not local or

student-specific issues'. However, a global movement for justice cannot honestly separate itself from national and local movements for the same. We must not encode this into P&P's ambit of operation. First, because it is tactically injudicious for movements not to support, and learn from, each others' strength; secondly because it confines us to a middle-class (and upward) constituency; third, because it is - according to the analysis outlined in the [Where Now? pamphlet](#) - not true to say that they face fundamentally distinct problems. Not all struggles are connected, but very many are.

So our slogan is this: We must understand the world in order to change it.

Where Now? pamphlet:

<http://www.pandpnetwork.dreamhosters.com/pamphlet/pamphlet.pdf>

Capturing the freshers

by Rhiannon Horsley (Reading)

Freshers' fairs are an important time for groups. Fresh faced first years provide the vital continuation that People and Planet groups need, and also inject some new enthusiasm into a group. But what is the best way to attract and keep them? Obviously for most the best way to 'reach out' to freshers is at the legendary freshers fair. But how to make yourself noticed in the sea of free chocolate? More puzzling still, how do you avoid losing all the interested students in the first meeting?

Getting them in freshers' week

Should stalls be covered in rainbows and peace signs, or a bit more sophisticated, perhaps with some colour co-ordination? Should you ram as much information onto your tiny little table as possible, or just have small business cards with your meeting times on? Should you have hundreds of members crowded round, or just a couple of people to meet and greet? Should you avoid hippyishness or embrace it in all its tie-dye glory?

At the very least you'll need an eye-grabbing and instantly recognisable stall, one that draws the ethically minded like flies. But this just presents more problems: 'People and Planet' is quite an ambiguous name, not

many people will have heard of it. Everyone knows what Amnesty International is, the football club is quite self explanatory, but People and Planet - what is that? So maybe draw attention to the main campaigns: Fairtrade, Aids, and Go Green/Stop Climate Chaos. But how do you do that? Hire a giant wind turbine for the day? Well maybe, thinking big is definitely the way to go. Make a big banner to go over your stall emblazoned with 'People and Planet', and then around the P&P symbol paint in a few giant aids ribbons, the Fairtrade symbol, maybe a wind turbine. Write what the symbols stand for underneath, after all people might not recognise them.

So the overhead decoration is sorted, but what about the actual table? Some people have said they were overwhelmed with info at their freshers stall, so maybe keep it simple. Why not put together a little leaflet on what your group gets up to, what it has achieved, what it is trying to achieve. Too many postcards and leaflets confuse the brain and often bear little relation to what you've been up to these past few years.

How many people are you going to have at your stall? Have too many people and you risk looking over-eager, or you could all end up chatting to each other and missing all the freshers. Then again you don't want one poor person trying to talk to twelve people at once! Personally i think about three to five people would be a great number. It's tempting to get really caught up catching up with your mates, but people might feel rude walking up and interrupting you if you're talking. Equally you don't want to stand there in silence looking depressed as though nobody in your group gets on. A reasonable number of people on the stall can ensure you're having fun but you also always have someone appearing approachable.

Most importantly make sure there is information about your meetings, what time they are, where they are (put a map on there too, uni's are huge places when you first get there). If they're late let people know about getting home, any night bus services they could use, if people will be willing to walk them back to halls if they're nervous going by themselves. Think of reasons like this why people might not come, and resolve them.

Now, where does hippyness fit into all of this? Personally I think it should be avoided, you want to attract as many people as possible and a stall festooned with flowers and peace loving vibes, will probably scare people away. Similarly having a Greenday album or a collection of 80s peace camp songs blasting out might not attract as many people as you'd think!

So to summarise I'd go for a stall that clearly shows what People and Planet do, had some leaflets, but

doesn't look like you've emptied your leaflet box onto the table. Have really clear information about your meetings. Staff with enthusiastic, friendly people to talk to our eager freshers, entice them in, make them feel like they want to come to the meeting. And maybe offer a few free chocs, after all everyone else will.

But why should you only focus on the freshers fair? In many universities freshers are hanging around for a week before lectures start, why not had out leaflets around campus with meeting times and information about your groups? Not everyone will come to freshers fair. And don't forget second, third years (and forth years for you in Scotland) and post graduates. Target re-registration queues, perhaps target departments where the students might be more attracted to our causes.

The first meeting

OK, so you've enticed your freshers and your first meeting is packed; due to the vast numbers that have your thinking of changing your meeting place to the local stadium, but what do you do now? How do you keep them? How do you persuade them that they yours is the best society and that they should stick around?

The standard P&P advice is always good: put a couple of people on the door to meet and greet, say 'hi' to people as they come in and make them feel welcome. Maybe crack out the Fairtrade tea bags and make some vegan cookies. This might be a great time to get out all those leaflets that you have been hoarding, give people something to do in that slightly awkward gap between people arriving and getting things going, although if you can try and talk to people too. Find out their interests and suggest overlaps with your group.

Now everyone is sipping their Fairtrade tea and they're eager to hear what you get up to. Do you launch into a slick presentation explaining the complexities of TRIPS? Or do you all go round and say where you went for your summer holidays (tutting appropriately at the long haul flyers). An ice breaker is good, and I would personally go for something that might get people laughing, moving around or feeling more relaxed. Getting everyone to introduce themselves might be good too, but be weary of making it too long - names aren't that interesting, and people will mostly forget anyway.

Everyone is a bit more comfortable, what do you do now? Time for the presentation? I would keep things simple, maybe chat through what you're trying to achieve at the moment, what you've done in the past, what you hope to do in the future. Try and get more

than one person to talk, break it up a bit, talk about the social aspect too (if you have one). Be aware that while you might all be very comfortable around each other the newbies wont be, so maybe save the story about the food poisoning on the aids trip to Kenya with no toilets for miles until a few weeks in.

Try and involve the freshers, make it clear that you need their input too though don't be too demanding. When I first arrived I can remember thinking that everyone knows so much, and I know nothing; how can I help? Think of ways of involving people, making them feel more comfortable.

Once the first meeting is over, and I'd try and keep it snappy. Why not go out for a drink? Give people the opportunity to get to know each other in a more friendly environment.

But of course everyone is different, and hopefully my little ramble will be useful to someone. I remember entering out people and planet group to find it in need of direction and hope that we have stepped up to that, and that we can capture the mind and imagination of the hordes of freshers arriving in September.

Write for the next issue!

Were you disgusted by the bad arguments in one of these articles? Maybe they were so great that you spent two sleepless nights engaging in a Socratic dialogue in your head trying to sort the issues out yourself?

We're looking for authors for the next issue. You just need to write something of interest, between 500 and 6,000 words long, and you need to make it readable. We'll take just about anything that advances the debate.

What's more, we have contacts with lots of editors from online and print magazines, and can help get any really good articles into a "real" publication.

So get scribbling and submit via the journal web site: <http://www.pandpnetwork.dreamhosters.com/journal>

We're also looking for editors, who just need an eye for grammatical mistakes and a charitable sensibility when it comes to rephrasing others' work.

The next issue will come out in June or July, depending on how many entries we get.