

Top green student Maria fuels environmental savings

Law student Maria McAlister has powered her way into the final of a national environmental competition after undertaking a biodiesel placement on Bute and surrounding areas.

The 20-year-old from the Isle of Bute qualified for the Scottish final of the Environmental Placement Programme 2009 (EPP), organised by the Business Environment Partnership (BEP), after finishing top of the Highlands & Islands heat.

During an eight week summer placement Maria implemented a regular waste vegetable oil collection service for the production of biodiesel at Fyne Futures Recycling Centre. By powering its vehicles with vegetable oil which is converted into fuel on site, the company will save up to £5,400 per year on fuel bills (a saving of 63%) and reduce its carbon emissions by 14 tonnes per year.

She received a cheque for £100 and goes on to compete in the Scottish national final, where prizes will be presented by First Minister Alex Salmond at Edinburgh Zoo next Thursday 10 September. She will be joined by five students from other Scottish regional heats, each competing for the £500 first prize.

Maria commented: "I found it very beneficial to see how a business is run and the day-to-day difficulties that are faced. My placement has increased my awareness of the importance of recycling and the different ways everyone can do their bit for the environment. As a result of the placement, I'm considering going on to study environmental law."

Ailsa Clark, Project Manager from Fyne Futures, spoke highly of the programme, adding: "It has been hugely beneficial to have a fresh pair of eyes focused on a specific area of work. Maria's professional approach has produced a valuable resource for our future development of biodiesel. The work she has undertaken will provide a lasting legacy for Fyne Futures' biodiesel production."

Donald Rose, Senior Adviser at the Business Environment Partnership, said: "I was very impressed by the standard of the projects in the Highlands and Islands' EPP. The students brought great enthusiasm and initiative to some very worthwhile projects throughout the area. It is great to see tangible business and environmental benefits from these projects and how much the students gain from their experience."

The EPP is sponsored by Shell U.K. Limited, the Scottish Government and SEPA.

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