



Northumbria University Best Newcomer

Improving Sustainability Together – our success story (so far...)

About the project

Summary

Our story celebrates our journey since 2015, developing sustainability's small, narrow remit, to a university-wide commitment with engagement at its core.

The results

The problem

Prior to 2015, 'sustainability' was seen as the responsibility of Campus Services alone, with its primary focus being to ensure compliance. Our estate and operations were growing, and so were our carbon emissions. There was clearly a need to reconsider sustainability - what it means to the University and how we would achieve improvements.

The approach

There have been six key stages to our story so far:

- **Gained commitment** - by including sustainability as a core commitment within our University Strategy.
- **Invested in resources** – recruited experienced staff, provided budgets and established volunteer networks.
- **Set direction and accountability** – developed a comprehensive policy, established specific action plans and targets and assigned responsibilities to groups from across the University.
- **Developed a brand** – created a new, relevant, positive and bold presence for sustainability, raising awareness and connecting the diverse range of sustainability activity undertaken.
- **Prioritised engagement** – established a continuous programme of engagement with staff, students and partners, from campaigns to research, in order to develop sustainability skills and knowledge relevant to the University as well as the global sustainability challenge.
- **Building momentum** – our work aims to create a snowball effect, continually generating new ideas and enthusiasm which we can utilise to grow sustainability further and to realise further success.

Our goals

Our goal for sustainability is simple - to deliver significant improvements in environmental sustainability, and to develop the skills and knowledge of our staff and students in order to support sustainability at Northumbria University and to contribute at a global level.



Profile

- Higher Education
- 27,100 students (includes full and part time students)
- 2,700 staff
- Urban



Obstacles and solutions

How can you raise the profile of sustainability?	'Sustainability' covers a huge range of topics and considerations. We brought together targets for all these areas, within the one Environmental Sustainability Policy, developed icons to showcase each area but then united all the programmes of activity under the one header of 'Improving Sustainability Together'.
How do you engage a diverse population?	Run a diverse range of initiatives and make it relevant to the individual. Most sustainability activities have additional benefits which might be more immediately engaging – such as saving money, improving employability or supporting student experience.
How do you build momentum in a continually changing environment?	Allocate specific responsibilities to faculties and services, rather than relying on specific people. As structures change, those responsibilities will still need to be addressed. Keep sustainability as a key consideration within all decisions and show off our achievements – people want to stay involved in something that is positive.

Performance and results

This work over the past two years has achieved significant benefits – we have saved £1 million on energy costs, reduced our carbon emissions by 32%, run over 70 sustainability events, reused thousands of items, and supported collaboration between hundreds of staff, students and partner organisations.

CO2 savings

CO2t savings 2016/2017:	3,200 tonnes (Actual)
CO2t savings 2017/2018:	2,600 tonnes (Estimated)
CO2t savings over the life cycle of the project:	Cumulative savings of 9,000 tonnes to date (and counting...) (Actual, since 2014/15))

The future

Top 3 learnings from implementing your project

1. Set clear direction and accountability, but be open to new ideas.
2. Being responsive is key to engagement – always respond to ideas or questions.
3. Be thorough – think long-term (as sustainability must be sustainable).

Sharing your project

We work closely with other Higher Education and Further Education providers via the EAUC network. We also work closely with other local organisations – sharing best practice and co-developing a number of projects. We also use our work and our Campus as a living lab – sharing our experiences with our students.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

It has been fantastic recognition of the successes we have achieved in the past two years and is a wonderful way of saying 'thank you' to our staff and students. Being shortlisted helps to raise further awareness of our sustainability story – an awareness that we can further develop as we continue to build momentum and deliver successes.

Further information

Katie Ridley – Sustainability Adviser – katie.a.ridley@northumbria.ac.uk
www.northumbria.ac.uk/sustainability @NUenvironment