

University of Stirling + Students' Union Student Engagement The Green + Blue Space: The University of Stirling's Environmental Heart

About the project

Summary

The Green + Blue Space is the Students' Union's vibrant hub for environmental engagement. Hosting a wide variety of facilities and activities throughout the year, it provides an effective platform for peer-to-peer learning around sustainability and the environment, with a particular focus on waste and responsible, healthy food.

The hub features a permanent donation and reuse area (The Fair Share) and a food cooperative (The Food Hive), as well as a recycling station, creative corner, social area (so comfortable that on a quiet day you may be lucky enough to spot a sleeping student), office, library and storage area. Outside, a community garden and orchard complement the indoor space.

The Green + Blue Dream Team runs the hub. Made up of staff and a large number of volunteers, the team dedicates its time to delivering everything from food growing and cookery classes to the end of term reuse collection and partners up with various departments in the University and local charities to maximise its impact.

With a wide variety of activities and high levels of engagement, The Green + Blue Space combines a significant improvement of the student experience, wellbeing, life skills & employability with community outreach, while building environmental awareness and minimising the environmental impact of our university community.

Project partners

The Students' Union coordinates the delivery of all activities. The University provides the unit housing the Space. Significant support is provided by Estates & Campus Services and Accommodation Services. External partners include funders (incl. Keep Scotland Beautiful, CSGN Orchards Grant Scheme), local food bank Start Up Stirling and various homeless charities.

The results

The problem

Before the opening of The Green + Blue Space, there was little environmental engagement at the University.



Profile

- HE
- 11,000 FTE Students
- 1400 staff
- Rural

Category supported by



Finalist's case study

With disconcerting levels of waste at over 60kg of waste per student at the end of the academic year (2013 figures), there was a definite need for change.

The approach

The Space covers every aspect of sustainable living, combines indoor and outdoor activities and delivers actual change in the community through the active stimulation of the intrinsic values associated with positive environmental behaviour. Successful engagement is further cemented through the creation of a positive social context around these values and behaviours.

Our goals

Reduce our environmental impact by building a well-informed, healthy, skilled, caring and responsible community.

Obstacles and solutions

<p>Obscurity – It's easy to operate within a niche of already engaged people, but that is hardly transformational.</p>	<p>The Green + Blue Space was our answer to this obstacle. A physical space, in a central area made our activities visible and provided a social context, allowing engagement levels to rise spectacularly.</p>
<p>Institutional commitment – The offer of the unit for the Space was the first sign of commitment and we've come a long way since then.</p>	<p>At first glance, environmental initiatives can appear of little benefit to institutions beyond carbon reduction. Translating your activities into language that resonates with all elements of the University can make or break your projects. A good starting point is your institution's strategic plan.</p>

Performance and results

Awareness raising on environmental issues and capacity building to tackle these issues through the Green + Blue Space has led to a 305.6t reduction in CO_{2e} emissions to date, saved 19 tonnes of reusable items from going to landfill, increased recycling rates by 64% and brought a garden and orchard to the University. At the same time, the Green + Blue Space has improved the student experience, reduced living costs for the University community and fostered bonds with the wider community. Moreover, the participants and volunteers delivering these changes developed key life skills, improved their employability and experienced an increased sense of physical, mental and social wellbeing.

The future

Lessons learned

- Identify the values your project needs to stimulate and make sure the project itself lives and breathes these.
- Focus on long term behavior change as opposed to quick results.
- We all have food in common, making it arguably the strongest engagement tool out there.
- In order to appeal to the effervescent student body, projects need to be flexible.

Sharing your project

Many HEI based environmental projects in Scotland are connected through a common funder, the Climate Challenge Fund. The requirement of this fund for diligent reporting allows projects to learn from each other. This

has allowed the Green + Blue Space to be used as an example for others, as well as learning from others for its individual activities.

The Green + Blue Space has won a variety of NUS awards since its inception. This recognition has increased its level of legitimacy.

Social media are incredibly effective, as they allow both internal and external communication while bypassing norms of bureaucracy and formality.

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

"A prestigious Green Gown Award for 'The Green + Blue Space' would be fantastic national recognition for this innovative student engagement project. A joint University of Stirling - Students' Union initiative, it further strengthens the sense of community and sustainability on our beautiful campus."

Professor Gerry McCormac, University of Stirling Principal and Vice-Chancellor.

Further information

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