



Green Gown Awards 2016



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Finalist's case study

University of Chester Student Sustainability Champion Karen Elliott



University of
Chester

About the project

Summary

Throughout my university career at Chester I became highly involved with a multitude of environmental causes, societies and projects, including the National Union of Students' (NUS) Green Impact and Responsible Futures programmes, as well as more campus based initiatives such as Green Chester and the People and Planet Society.

Green Chester aims to increase students' knowledge and awareness on all things sustainable at university, as well as to improve the University estate's energy efficiency through more environmentally friendly techniques. Through People and Planet, students play part in the cause of increasing awareness to others in the community and within students about environmental issues, animal welfare and human rights through means of campaigns and events.

In collaboration with the Cheshire West and Chester Council, Waste Reduction Volunteers aim to encourage people to find alternative ways to use leftover food and material goods before putting it to waste. This can be through composting, leftover recipes to make food go further, and through upcycling or reinventing material goods.

Through my efforts, I have been awarded a Valedictory award from the Geography Department for the Keith Hilton Prize for Geography due to my dedication to sustainable affairs, and for consistently producing work of a high standard in my academic studies.

Project partners

- Green Chester
- Students from the UoC People and Planet Society
- NUS Green Impact
- NUS Responsible Futures
- Cheshire West and Chester Council

The results

The problem

Environmental issues and how to reduce them and their impacts is not widely spoken about, and so rarely solutions are either. Not many people, students in

Profile

- Higher Education
- 16,800 students (includes full and part time students)
- 2000 staff
- Urban and Rural, Historic and Modern





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particular are aware of the issues surrounding them both locally and internationally, and it is important to improve this awareness (e.g. People and Planet). Waste is also often a taboo topic, but it is perhaps the most important aspect of environmental impacts as that is the one main thing that humans contribute to the earth.

The approach

To address the aims and goals set out, various options were undertaken. Participation at volunteering events for Green Chester such as the volunteer fair, Fix it Fair, and Food Fest were good for encouraging the engagement of the students. Regular meetings held for People and Planet, organizing future events such as fundraising or campaigns. Charity bake sales, and also involvement with the University allotment provided variety. Community events such as at fetes and fairs, as well as at schools helped to promote the cause of reducing waste and finding an alternative direction and use for it.

Our goals

- To help transform the environmental impact of the way we work and learn together at the University of Chester.
- To embed sustainability throughout the University's campuses, communities, cultures and curriculum.
- To inform people of more sustainable ways of utilizing waste
- Create a more sustainable university both in mind and matter.

Obstacles and solutions

Obstacle	Solution
Encouraging students to become involved in environmentally focused initiatives and societies	Incentives such as collecting volunteering hours through the university scheme that can lead to rewards and awards, freebies (i.e. 'Follow the Pack' Green T's), and pride of helping others.
Increasing awareness of university based initiatives (People and Planet Society, Green Chester)	Promotion through Social Media platforms Twitter and Facebook, as well as through email 'Warble Wednesday' newsletters. Took part in events such as Food Fest and Live Well fairs to gain recognition of Green Chester. People and Planet held frequent meetings and events.

Performance and results

Through educating students and the university community on sustainable issues, it was seen that from then on, students were more likely to carry out environmentally friendly behaviours or become more aware of wider environmental issues. Through work with the University and thoughts of students, the University invested highly in the installation of Solar PV panels on multiple university buildings, resulting in huge drops in energy usage due to increased power provided through the panels. More students resulted in joining with the 'Green T' team with Green Chester to help out at open days or university events, helping to spread the word further. Waste reduction events, especially at the university soon showed that improved knowledge of correct waste disposal helped students fit more into neighborhoods due to reduced issues of wrong bins, wrong time! This also made them more aware of recycling on and off campus.



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The future

Lessons learned

If you are passionate about something and want to get your ideas across, people are more likely to become involved themselves and to pass this on.

Don't be disappointed if you can't meet your goals or objectives straight away, but don't forget to share your achievements and successes too!

Sharing your project

[How have you communicated your project? What effect has this had?]

For each aspect, each was communicated effectively across the university community and to the wider local community in some areas. Social media was also utilized to gain interest into each initiative (i.e. Green Chester, People and Planet) for example for events coming up, meetings. My involvement in so many environmental initiatives soon was recognised within my department and through volunteering awards for growing hours for example. This also soon helped to promote the causes further in a way.

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

The University of Chester is always striving to continually improve its environmental performance through both policies and processes, but also through the influence of the students. The development of the University as a whole in its sustainability journey would be encouraged and influenced greatly if Karen were to win this award, demonstrating all levels of progress towards an eco-university.

These Awards are an invaluable measure of the priority higher education gives to its environmental commitment. Thanks to the motivation and influence of change agents, such as Karen, our university community is inspired collectively to make a positive difference. Winning this award is a huge honour, recognising the hard work of our students, and demonstrating the impact they have on the University.

Professor Tim Wheeler, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Chester

Further information

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