



Green Gown
Awards 2016



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Finalist's case study

University of Gloucestershire Enterprise and Employability Taking a SIP: students learn the real-world taste of sustainability



About the project

Summary

The SIP (Sustainability Internships Programme) offers students a taste of professional life that satisfies the growing thirst for sustainability skills across professions. This new initiative offers bespoke internship experiences for students on any course in a wide range of work environments, flavoured with Education for Sustainability (EfS) principles. Working with internal University departments and external partners of our UNU RCE Severn, the SIP is helping to advance sustainability in a range of teams, organisations and communities. Students find the experience of these internships to be transformative, building their confidence, change skills and ability to interpret sustainability in the real world in a meaningful way connected with their studies.

Project partners

The initiative provides a proof-of-concept for embedding EfS work into our University employability strategy. Led by the Sustainability team, the project is building a strong three-way partnership between students, staff and external employers. Internal partners include: University Employability team and academic departments for dissemination of opportunities. External UNU RCE Severn partners include Cheltenham Green Doors, Vision 21, Gloucestershire County Council, and Madia and Matilda (sustainable fashion company).

The results

The problem

There is evidence of increased employer demand and growing student expectations for universities to support the development of graduates who are 'fit for the future'. This calls upon a need to provide students with real-world learning experiences, which enable them to cultivate and apply sustainability skills, knowledge and mindsets in a professional context.

The approach

The University of Gloucestershire Sustainability team is working to embed an EfS approach to internship and placement opportunities, which are open to all students regardless of their subject specialism. By working in partnership with internship hosts and the employability team they identify sustainability challenges or priorities for the department or organization in order to shape bespoke projects for students to respond to with solutions. This provides the space for students to take ownership of their work and develop skills and knowledge for sustainability relevant to their future professional lives.



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Our goals

- **Graduate employability:** Provide our students with meaningful learning experiences, which enable them to become sustainability conscious future professionals by making meaningful contributions to their internship/placement hosts
- **Partnership building:** Enhance partnerships and collaborative knowledge exchange opportunities by increasing engagement between the University and community
- **Advance sustainability:** Advance environmental, social and economic sustainability in workplaces by bringing an EfS approach to learning into University departments, the community and local industry

Obstacles and solutions

Time constraints and limited staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With support from the Sustainability Engagement Manager and University Employability team, SIP hosts are able to ensure students gain valuable learning experiences • Clear, concise communication of SIP intern role and work plan from the outset of the internship ensures students remain engaged and interns work independently with regular 'catch-ups' rather than continuous face-to-face support
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SIP comprises of 80hour unpaid internships which ensure students have clear opportunities for learning and development • Working collaboratively with the employability team and academic staff across the University it is possible to scale-up the SIP with shared communications and pastoral support for interns.
Sustainability seen as a priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIP interns are able to support organisations and University departments to move forward for sustainability and tackle sustainability challenges by increasing capacity and identifying solutions to these challenges.

Performance and results

The SIP was recently recognised for its contribution to sustainability education in 'Youth' capacity building when it received a UN University RCE Outstanding Flagship project award. BiGGY, which has informed the development of the SIP, was selected as one of NESTA and the Observer's Top 50 New Radicals in 2014. BiGGY stood out from over 1000 other projects for its innovative approach, community influence and contributions towards positive social change.

SIP Pilot 2015 - 16: 16 student interns/new partnerships internally and externally.

BiGGY Summer Placements 2015: 6 pre-university students completed 10 placements in the community.

Engaging other University Teams: 5 staff support promotion/recruitment of students, advising on job descriptions and providing professional/pastoral support.

Establishing meaningful partnerships: SIP hosts have been working closely with the Sustainability Engagement Manager to develop bespoke projects meeting the needs of their organisation/ department and the students' professional development needs.

2015 – 16 SIP hosts comprised: University teams (10 staff), RCE Severn partners (11 staff).



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The future

Lessons learned

1. **Empowerment breeds success** - Give students the space and opportunity to be empowered and they have the potential to become innovative, futures thinking and transformative individuals making valuable contributions to society, the environment, and the economy.
2. **Make it relevant** - Designing bespoke internships, embedded with EfS, enables a valuable and impactful approach to professional development for all involved in the three-way partnership of student, the University and community/industry.
3. **Go the extra mile** – Building positive relationships between the student interns and mentors in the SIP host organisations has been proven to support students to drive their work forward and aim high with their work. This approach promotes an EfS learning partnership between the student and mentor.

Sharing your project

The SIP has a strong web presence on the UoG sustainability website. This is important for sharing SIP opportunities and related guidance. We use social media to bring the SIP to a wider audience and student-produced YouTube videos showcase its high calibre outputs.

Dissemination continues in 2016-17 with promotion at Freshers' Fayre/Opportunity Showcases and promotion is supported by the University Employability team.

The SIP has been shared at UK conferences throughout 2015 - 2016, with significant interest from other institutions and the NUS regarding replication/expansion. It was disseminated internationally as best practice via the UNU Global RCE network, having received an Outstanding Flagship Project award for youth capacity building.

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

"Gaining recognition as a Green Gown Award Finalist is a powerful affirmation that genuine commitment to Education for Sustainability must encompass redesign of the curriculum across all subject areas and help students build their own career employability. External, expert recognition to the creativity and commitment which staff and students have devoted to this project, encourages others to follow their example" – Vice-Chancellor, Stephen Marston.

Further information

(Include contacts details, social media links, and website address)

For further information contact Meg Baker, Sustainability Engagement Manager – rcesevern@glos.ac.uk

Website: <http://sustainability.glos.ac.uk/students/internships/>

Facebook: @Uniglos Sustainability

Twitter: @uniglossustain