



Green Gown
Awards 2016



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Finalist's case study

University of Chester

Food and Drink

Encouraging sustainability through hospitality: the Chester way

About the project

Summary

How to engage a wide variety of staff, students and visitors with environmental and sustainability agenda through hospitality? This is the key that faced the University of Chester's Hospitality and Residential Services team and a challenge they eagerly took on through the key areas of food procurement and waste, packaging, catering equipment and environmentally-friendly initiatives. The issue of food packaging and waste is a significant concern for the industry in addition to the environment, and this project focuses on the inventive ways in which the University tackles the 'Polystyrene Problem' and identifies the issues surrounding food waste in a popular and successful North West university.

Project partners

University of Chester's Hospitality and Residential Services team and University staff and students.

The problem

Within the food service sector, growing awareness of impacts of food waste, alongside consumer pressure for sustainable food service practices, is proving a major concern for foodservice managers. With more individuals eating away from home, the role of food service managers adopting methods of sustainable waste management and prevention will increase. Food and community are inextricably linked, particularly when it concerns first year university students living in a strange place and trying to make friends. This is one problem we seek to tackle. Another problem is the issue of polystyrene food tubs. We calculated that we used approximately 75,000 polystyrene (non-recyclable) food tubs a year, thus exacerbating the problem of waste products going to landfill. These are the two significant problems we are tackling, and use a variety of different means to address them.

The approach

Our approach is to be inclusive, enthusiastic and to encourage all customers to take control of their choices. The Hospitality team recognises the crucial role that Hospitality Services plays in contributing to the University's sustainable future: the department responsible for feeding the entire University underpins all that the institution does, and it seeks to lead by example. In continually striving for excellence in sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in addition to the sterling customer service provided by all outlets, the department, at all levels, recognises the importance of promoting the benefits of sustainable practice and changing attitudes. The Hospitality Services teams are at the forefront of the University's sustainability and environmental initiatives, as it is a normal consideration for the department, neither an afterthought nor an inconvenience. Posters are



University of
Chester

Profile

- Higher Education
- 20,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 2,090 staff
- Semi-rural institution

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included in all outlets advocating meat free days and empowering customers and guests to take control of their environmental impact through food and drink, practices and packaging. The department's ethos is to enthuse staff, students and visitors about sustainable processes, not talk down to customers and certainly not dictate what they should and should not do. This results in a culture of empowerment, where individuals take control and choose to be green.

Our goals

Our goals are to enthuse staff, students and visitors to take control of their environmental impact through their choices relating to food; to obliterate the use of polystyrene tubs and the associated easy 'desk/lunch' culture that accompanies them; to engage our customers as partners and ask their guidance as we seek to significantly lower our environmental impact as an institution. Team Chester: All together better!

Obstacles and solutions

Obstacles	Solutions
Changing attitudes	Persistent communication, talking to students and staff as partners will ensure a greater level of 'buy in' rather than trying to dictate what they should do.
Ensuring partnership with students	Bringing students on board! Asking for their opinions, and the work carried out by students in the Geography and International Development department to assess the work ensured that we are working together.
Ensuring longevity of the project	Commitment by everyone in the team to the project, if staff members are enthused by what they are trying to do, then that enthusiasm is infectious! The project is cost neutral, so this isn't an issue to worry about, but enthusiasm is the winning element.

Performance and results

The Eco Box is a self-supporting initiative. At least £3,000 per academic year was spent on polystyrene boxes. This was all unnecessary expenditure, resulting in 78,000 polystyrene boxes a year going to non-recyclable waste. We identified this as a serious problem, seeing the boxes discarded across the campuses; the project was set up, despite some early resistance from staff and students, with the assistance of a catering equipment supplier, and the promotional work, attitude change, enthusiasm invoking and logistics were all managed by the Hospitality team. The money saved from electricity costs are reinvested into the University through several means. Our students are our priorities; these initiatives free up additional moneys which can go towards student-led projects including those which are devised and carried out by the People and Planet Society, with whom the Hospitality department and Sustainability Unit work very closely. For 2015 (our last set of complete data), switching to LED lighting and utilising electric vehicles led to 414.75 tonnes savings in CO₂e, 5% of current electricity consumption in 2014/15 and 802, 821KWh, equating to £96,338.52 savings. The 2015 Solar PV projects have provided 327,919kWh of total installed capacity, reducing our carbon footprint by 152 tonnes of CO₂e achieving a further 3.9% of the carbon reduction target (3856tCO₂e) and generating 1% of the University's total electric requirements from solar energy. The review carried out by Level 6 students showed that, before the campaigns carried out by the Hospitality team, that over 90% of customers in White's dining hall alone were unaware of current initiatives to reduce food waste at Whites. During the campaign week, this changed, with 86% of the sample population aware of food waste initiatives, demonstrating a significant and highly positive increase.



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The future

Lessons learned

We have been blown away by the positive response from students, staff and visitors. A key lesson that we have learned is that our customers want to make environmentally-friendly choices, they want to lower the impact on the environment, and that we can engage them and make that choice much easier.

Sharing your project

We have already started sharing our work with other institutions, which are following our lead and introducing similar campaigns and looking to tackle the 'Polystyrene Problem'! We are sharing our journey and learning points through the TUCO network of institutions.

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

That our work has been recognised by the Green Gown Awards is giving us such a significant boost to keep moving forward, keep motivating students, staff and visitors to think sustainably!

Further information

Twitter: @UoCCatering