



Green Gown
Awards 2016



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Finalist's case study

University of Leicester Enterprise and Employability APPLES



Profile

- Higher Education
- 20,150 students (includes full and part time students)
- 4525 staff
- Urban parkland
- Established 1957

About the project

Summary

APPLES (Applied Learning in Sustainability) is a project that combines environmental sustainability and student entrepreneurship. We are enabling students to innovate projects and business cases to improve sustainability, providing them with a range of skills for their future career. Collaborating with our Students' Union, through APPLES we have placed the student voice at the core of our sustainability work.

Our focus is on nourishing students to achieve their full potential, planting seeds of opportunity and encouraging them to approach challenges creatively. From a business case for more drinking water fountains, to a homemade organic jam enterprise, we have enabled our students to create a real difference with their ideas.

Project partners

University of Leicester Students' Union
Academic Departments (Genetics, Natural Sciences, Maths, Engineering, Archeology and more)
Hungry4Change
Environmental Action Society
Leicester City Council
Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust

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Morsbags community
Green and Pleasant (local business)
Local schools
Saffron Acres

The results

The problem

APPLES was created due to a student demand for both education relating to sustainability and opportunities to develop their employability. We also needed to unify our approach to delivering student experience and developing a Sustainability Strategy that would have University-wide impact.

The approach

Our approach involved three core components, including:

- a Sustainable Development Programme, in which students complete environmental volunteering, learn how to solve sustainability issues, and put their knowledge into practice with group projects
- a Student Sustainability Working Group which introduces students to the political side of affecting change within a large organisation, and enables student collaboration to create the changes they want to see
- a SEED fund of £5000 for student sustainability projects or dissertation research, alongside project and budget management training

Our goals

- Educate students beyond their degree studies about the importance and relevance of sustainability.
- Engage students with sustainability at the University and within Leicester.
- Allow student innovation and enterprise to enable student-led change.

Obstacles and solutions

<p>Communicating APPLES opportunities to students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As well as marketing APPLES with memorable imagery and branding, opportunities were advertised both on the University website and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. • Another approach included establishing a strong relationship with student environmental societies including the Environmental Action Society and Hungry 4 Change Society, to directly reach students with an existing interest in sustainability. • Promoting opportunities through the Students' Union and departments also enabled a direct line of communication to all students.
<p>Finding volunteering opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To find opportunities for students to complete their volunteering for the Sustainable Development Programme, we reached out to the Leicester community - including Leicester City Council, primary schools, and local organisations. • Arranging weekly to fortnightly volunteering opportunities enabled plenty of time and flexibility for students to achieve their volunteering hours, and more, throughout the year.



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Engaging students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make APPLES appeal to students, we focused on advertising the experiences transferable skills that APPLES would provide. • We integrated opportunities with existing structures at the University, including ensuring the opportunities HEAR accredited, and eligible to do with Leicester Award.
University relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to facilitate the APPLES project we needed to improve relations between the Environment Team and the Students' Union. Overcoming this obstacle included scheduling more meetings with Students' Union staff and developing strong relationships between staff. • Similarly making connections to staff in a range of academic departments has had the benefit of creating a database of project ideas and expertise that can be offered to students.

Performance and results

A variety of student-led individual and group projects, ranging from a project to encourage the use of reusable menstrual products, to increasing the bird diversity on University-owned greenspace. SSWG reps have collaborated to increase recycling rates in the Students' Union, tackle food waste and put together a business proposal to install 6 new water fountains around campus. Students have spent 2573 hours volunteering (2015-2016), with 43 students achieving the HEAR award. Relations with the local community have benefited from APPLES, with 432 hours spent working with the Leicester City Council ParkForce Conservation Team, and 5 bug hotels built around Leicester and with primary schools. Through gaining a range of sustainability knowledge and transferable skills, students have been empowered to tackle sustainability issues during their time at University and beyond.

The future

Lessons learned

1. Students have the motivation and ability to make change – trust them with responsibility and they may surprise you
2. Be visible – in both advertising opportunities and communicating the success of student projects
3. Be flexible – adapt your plan when necessary and teach students to do the same in their own projects

Sharing your project

We discussed our project with colleagues at the recent EAUC conference and have since been approached by other institutions keen to establish a similar project. In August we ran our third annual EAUC webinar, telling other organisations about APPLES and how it has been a recipe for success. Additionally the details of APPLES can be found on our website to inspire and inform with maximum transparency.

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

APPLES is the culmination of several years of work and we are finally seeing the fruits of our labour in the students that are taking the lead on sustainability. We are confident we have created a model with multiple benefits, which is itself sustainable, and can be replicated time and time again. As such we are very proud to be finalists for a Green Gown Award, which has recognised the efforts of both staff and students at the University of Leicester.



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Further information

Environment Team website: <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/estates/environment/student-opportunities/apples>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/environment.team/?fref=ts>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/UoL_Environment

Email us at environment@le.ac.uk