

eauc case study

CLASSIFICATION:
Communication & Management

SUB CLASSIFICATION:
EMS

TITLE:

Managing environmental impacts at Queen's University Belfast - the introduction of an ISO14001 Certified EMS

DATE:

July 2007



INSTITUTION PROFILE

HE

17,000+ FTE students

3,600 staff

260 buildings, some 100 of them listed as being of architectural merit

SUMMARY

A comprehensive environmental review was the starting point for Queen's University Belfast, which informed the process of the design and implementation of an EMS. Having responsibility for a significant portion of the University's support operations, the Estates Department and Purchasing Office completed the process and adopted the system. The EMS is focused on operational needs, so procedures and policies were only generated when they were needed. The EMS has helped each department understand their environmental impact and identify opportunities for improvement.

EAUC COMMENT

This case study shows the wide ranging benefits of introducing an EMS successfully. With the extra effort of ensuring senior management was on board shows that this is essential to gain ownership and commitment across the University. Queen's University Belfast show that by using an EMS you can make real improvements to an institution's environmental performance.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Queen's University Belfast & National Quality Assurance Ltd. (Certification Body)

THE PROBLEM

After being one of only 18 institutions participating in Forum for the Future's Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability (HEPS) project in 2003/04, Queen's University Belfast recognised the need for a formal system for evaluating, monitoring and reducing its environmental impact.

There was a general increase in expectations of the HE sector on environmental and sustainability issues and the University's own Corporate Social Responsibility commitments created the need for an initial environmental review. This established a benchmark of current environmental performance and reinforced the need for the implementation of an EMS.

THE APPROACH

The University's first environmental manager, appointed in April 2004, carried out a review of its environmental impacts which also included the impacts of legislation and a risk analysis.

The results of the review informed the process of establishing the Environmental Management System (EMS), including setting the benchmark for performance and identifying opportunities for improvement. The University's Sustainability Advisory Group decided the system should conform to the ISO14001 EMS standard.

The EMS was implemented in the Estates Department and Purchasing Office, which are responsible for the vast majority of the University's operational functions. It is deliberately simple and practical, focusing on operations not bureaucracy and is made up of policies and procedures linked to the ISO14001 clauses, a set of operational control procedures for high-risk activities, and environmental records. ISO14001 Certification was achieved in January 2007.

GOALS

- Establish the University's current level of environmental impact
- Develop an efficient system for managing that impact
- Achieve and maintain ISO14001 certification for the system
- Minimise risk to the University
- Identify opportunities to improve environmental performance and increase efficiency

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

- Finding the resources to carry out the review properly
 - as opposed to quickly
- Due to other pressures at the time, getting the required support and time from the senior management environmental review group
- Prioritisation of workloads
- Dedication of environment manager and team to the task
- Support from a consultant to carry out some of the audits
- Environmental Manager spoke to senior managers individually to help them understand the importance. Once they did, getting their time was not a problem.

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

Queen's University Belfast is one of only six universities and colleges to have achieved the ISO14001 certification for its EMS.

The EMS identified a number of areas of focus for improvement which included:

- Waste
- Energy
- Sustainable Construction
- Green Procurement

These are currently being addressed by the University, which has already seen savings and improvements as a result of the EMS.

For example;

- The introduction of an integrated waste management contract has so far resulted in significant cost savings e.g. £1,100 per month in the Students Union alone, and has allowed for increased recycling across the University
- An IT amnesty in August 2006 resulted in 28 tonnes of IT equipment being recycled.
- Moving to the use of recycled office paper across the University has significantly reduced its environmental impact. Approximately 200 tonnes are used annually.

LESSONS LEARNT

Involving staff in the process fosters a feeling of ownership. The team at Queen's ran a series of tailored environmental awareness sessions for different staff, from management to cleaning and operational staff. They were informed of the process and were able to input where appropriate. This meant that there was minimal resistance when procedures were changed as a result of the implementation of the EMS.

Designing and implementing a successful EMS is a huge task which requires long-term management. Anyone considering going through the same process needs to be prepared for a huge amount of work. However, if carried out properly the work will pay off in the long-term.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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