



Green Gown  
Awards 2013

Finalist's case study

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# Anglia Ruskin University Student and Staff engagement GoGreen Pilot'12: Employability, leadership and sustainability – Think big, start small!

## Section 1 About the project

### Summary

GoGreen Pilot'12 was a collaborative 18-month project focused on providing opportunities of education for sustainable development to students, organisations and practitioners interested in enhancing their knowledge and practices on environmental management. The pilot aimed at establishing links between 12 students working with 12 organisations of the third sector, facilitating organizational change toward sustainability, engaging with staff and employees, while writing their dissertations.

### Project partners

The project was led by a group of academics, practitioners, experts and students at the Lord Ashcroft International Business School (LAIBS) at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in partnership with the National Union of Students (NUS) and the University of Bristol (UoB).

## Section 2 The results

### The problem

Our major concern was how to develop a “pedagogy of passion for sustainability” aiming at integrating “physical and emotional or spiritual learning with traditional cognitive learning about sustainable management” (Shrivastava, 2010: 443). At the same time, recent research has shown a change in the perception of sustainability, whereby higher education students are increasingly realising that skills in sustainable development are significant for future employability (Bone and Agombar, 2011; Bone, Agombar and Kemp, 2013; HEA, 2013). We aim at developing practical and passionate engagement of students with sustainability through developing practical ways of education such as experiential learning, action learning, practice, and active student engagement.

### The approach

Our methodological approach was based on three pillars: action learning opportunities; the consideration of aesthetic aspects in the promotion of sustainability and the development of art-based methodologies for development; and reflective practice inspiring durable transformations for a sustainable future. Overall, we think that this type of programs needs to be fun, practical and achievable, while keeping sight of the challenges and big steps ahead. Indeed, our motto is: “Think big, start small”.



GO GREEN

### Profile

- GoGreen Pilot'12 is a collaborative teaching project funded by the Higher Education Academy.

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### Our goals

- To promote 12 action learning opportunities for students through work-learning placements with the aim of education for sustainable development.
- To improve employability options for students through the development of skills in the areas of auditing; environmental management systems; behavioural change and communication.
- To facilitate improvement of environmental practices in 12 third sector organisations, in the East of England supported, by the students' work.
- To create a virtual hub for exchange and mentorship amongst students, academics, employers and other stakeholders

### Obstacles and solutions

Recruitment and care of the students.	Recruitment is a key part of the employability agenda. This works in both ways, the project needs to put a lot of effort in inviting and enticing students.
Keeping student enthusiasm and constant support	We develop the GoGreen boosters as "formal" sessions to discuss issues related to the project. In addition we created more informal spaces, tea parties, meetings, where we could build a team spirit and create long lasting bonds.
Resources and time allocation for the GoGreen team	We underestimated the amount of time and resources required for this type of projects. We had to learn how to prioritise and we focused on the students experience more than the organisations work.

### Performance and results

We have improved employability options by providing 12 students the chance to undertake work-learning placements, and 10 being the recipients of IEMA approved training for eco-auditing in the third sector. As a result of this project 4 students are in pursuit of postgraduate education in the sustainability area (2 PhD, 2 Masters), 3 students highlighted GoGreen on their CVs and commented that this experience assisted with them becoming gainfully employed or getting further work experience (2 internships and 1 full time post). We have promoted education for sustainable development through the ARU curriculum with 9 students writing their dissertations based upon the project. We have facilitated change in 12 TSO's who collectively took 465 pro environmental actions where 337 were as a direct result of implementing the NUS GI model. These actions equated to approximate savings of 12704 kg CO2 and £4700. Anecdotal evidence from the organisations involved also show the impact of GoGreen Pilot'12 in their policies.

## Section 3 The future

### Lessons learned

In terms of students engagement and employability:

- One of the key elements of this project was to enhance students' employment opportunities. Throughout the whole process we created a platform to support professional skills, as mentioned above the recruitment strategy was rigorous as the purpose was to recruit the best possible students, due to the responsibility of liaising with organisations. As commented by the Employment Officer, Sue Strather, this process was very demanding and gave the students an idea of the high standards required in this and other projects in the workplace. The students commented informally about the seriousness of the project and it gave them a sense of pride when they were finally selected



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- A second element of the students' employability was the signature of a Voluntary Agreement, between the organisations' representatives, the university (Principal Investigator) and the students. This is a key aspect that also underlined the seriousness of the process and the students commented on the responsibility acquired when signing a document. In addition to this, there were some confidentiality points that restricted the use of mobiles and photographs. All of these elements show the importance of having an informal or formal "contract" when working with the students.
- Throughout the project we created informal spaces for discussing the challenges they encountered. For example, due to the nature of some TSOs, students encountered individuals with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, thus part of the informal conversations was how to understand the particularities of these conditions and how to work with respect. Lessons learnt here is that further consideration was required as to what types of organisations were being engaged and what additional training support was required. In addition, some students recommended that we start the project with team-building exercises, whereby rapport can be built and trust can be established.
- One of the lessons of this project is that it is recommended to work with students on the same level of academic progress. For instance, we recruited both postgraduates and undergraduates (mostly final year), both of which groups were very good and professional, but these two groups had different expectations and ways of working and different timeframes for dissertation submission. For future versions of this project it is recommended to work with second year students, going into their final year.
- Training on professional skills was a cross cutting issue, although some particular training was given in terms of communication skills (by the NUS). For future versions of this project, it is recommended to have special training on professional skills provided by the Employment Office or a similar department.
- As mentioned before, the scale and design of this project allowed that investigators were at the same time supervisors for the students' dissertations. If this type of project is going to be expanded it is crucial that the supervisors create and participate in the GoGreen Booster sessions.

## Sharing your project

Our dissemination activities focused on the variety of stakeholders, attending meetings, seminars, conferences, and networking events. We used social media (twitter, facebook and youtube). A virtual exchange hub has been created. This type of activities require long time for preparation, travelling and networking and they need to be included in budget and project planning.

We also have participated in international conferences such as the world symposium of universities and sustainable development; and some academic conferences at the national and international level.

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

Anglia Ruskin University is committed to include sustainability in all our activities: campus, curriculum, community and culture. GoGreen Pilot'12 is one of the many initiatives that are part of the Corporate Plan and the Teaching and Learning Strategy. This is one of the "best practice" models being highlighted for the Lord Ashcroft International Business School, and being finalist in the Green Gown Award gives us a boost in terms of being on the right track of innovative approaches to sustainability.



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## Further information

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/GoGreen-Movement/512544735439314>

<https://twitter.com/WeLoveGoGreen>.

[www.gogreenmovement.org](http://www.gogreenmovement.org)

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