

Aston University Continuous Improvement Aston Go Green

Section 1 About the project

Summary

The challenge for the Aston Go Green initiative, has been to translate the high level vision of “a University with sustainability at the core of all we do, meeting world-class standards for environmental performance”, into practical action and tangible benefits to the whole university community. Meeting challenging carbon reduction targets at a research led university against a backdrop of increasing staff and student numbers, reducing waste, improving travel choices, enhancing biodiversity, greening procurement and working to high ethical standards.

Project partners

Aston students, staff, alumni, community groups (Cycle Chain, Bike Right, Northfield Eco Centre, Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Group, Food Forest Brum), Birmingham City Council (winner of Best Waste and Recycling Award and runner-up in Energy Category in 2014, awarded Top Cycle Location status), Sustainability West Midlands, Birmingham District Energy Company and Climate KIC.

Section 2 The results

The problem

To move Aston University from a traditional research led institution to an institution with sustainability at the core of all that we do, meeting world class standards for environmental performance, achieving an absolute 53% carbon against a backdrop of increasing staff and student numbers.

The approach

The Aston Go Green initiative is led by the Energy, Environment and Sustainability Team. The wider Aston University community is engaged through the Go Green Champions and Go Green Leaders.

Go Green Leaders are senior academics or senior managers with the power to effect change and are tasked with supporting Champions to identify opportunities to imbed sustainability and challenge business as usual within their schools and departments.

Go Green Champions are responsible for completing the Go Green Workbook, which offers a structured method of identifying opportunities for improvement. Champions often work in teams and are supported by the Energy, Environment and Sustainability Team to achieve change.



Profile

- HEI
- 8,480 students (includes full and part time students)
- 1,285 staff
- Urban

Finalist's case study

Our goals

- A Carbon Management Plan with sector leading targets to achieve 53% absolute reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2020.
- Water reduction targets of 1% year on year
- Zero waste to landfill, with waste hierarchy a priority
- Achieving level 4 of the Flexible Framework
- Biodiversity Action Plan, led by an active staff/student Wildlife Group
- Soil Association Food for Life Accreditation for University Catering
- Transport Plan, Top Cycle Location status, led by an active BUG
- Fairtrade University, led by an active staff/student group
- Annual Go Green Week programme, supported by year round sustainability events and workshops.
- Ethics Framework with a Speak Up Policy and an independent external listener.

Performance and results

Since 2007 Aston University has facilitated significant improvement in its environmental performance. In 2007, Aston University was ranked 93rd in the People and Planet Green League and had no Environment and Sustainability staff. Today, Aston University has a permanent team of 4 Energy, Environment and Sustainability staff and has been ranked in the top 13 of the People and Planet Green League since 2010.

The University was awarded EcoCampus Platinum in 2012, which we maintained in 2013 and 2014, and has just been recommended for ISO 14001 accreditation in October 2014.

Since 2005/6, we have made an **absolute** reduction in our scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions of 22%, despite an increase in the size of the estate and staff and student numbers over that time. We are working hard to decouple any future growth in the university from increases in our carbon emissions, but challenging the assumptions of business as normal.

Since 2008, we have 20% fewer people driving to campus, 13% more people using public transport and 10% more walking and cycling.

In 2008, 20% of our waste was recycled, today 91% of our waste is recycled, any residual waste is sent to energy from waste, achieving our target of zero waste to landfill.

There is an active network of Go Green Champions, who are engaged in environmental auditing, energy efficiency measure, reuse initiatives, charitable donations and supporting practical actions such as the Grow Aston food growing project.

Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

To truly achieve institutional change you need support at all levels. Engaging students is challenging, need to make sustainability a pleasure not a chore. Communication is key, use all of the channels open to you as often as you can.

Sharing our project

We have used social media and our website www.aston.ac.uk/environonment to communicate our Aston Go Green initiatives. Social media is especially important to us in engaging students in our Aston Go Green projects.

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

It is really pleasing to be recognised for commitment to sustainability. Winning a Green Gown Award would highlight our commitment to a wider audience.

Further information

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