

South Thames College

Best Newcomer

Community engagement and the curriculum

Section 1

Summary

This project provides a practical demonstration of 'stakeholder engagement'. It illustrates how South Thames College (STC) is forging alliances with low carbon community organisations, trades unions and campaign groups. The Furzedown Low Carbon Zone, (FLCZ) was established to demonstrate the link between curriculum and community engagement.

A range of measures on energy efficiency, renewable energy and environmental awareness have been introduced. This has been linked to the curriculum by involving students from the Engineering and Building Services School. Furzedown residents have benefited and the institution has been able to showcase a practical example of out-facing community work.

Project partners

Greener Jobs Alliance, Battersea and Wandsworth TUC, Sustainable Merton, Transition Town Tooting, Green Skills Partnership, Unionlearn, Project Dirt, Kingston University, National Union of Students, Wandsworth Environment Forum, Parity Projects, JoJu Solar, Southern Solar, Eardley School and the Furzedown Community Network.

Section 2

The problem

The tertiary sector is required to address the issue of employability. To do this effectively means integrating sustainability skills into the curriculum. In many areas of the curriculum this is not being done. Many institutions also stress the importance of community engagement. There is often limited evidence of this taking place or where it is done it often fails to incorporate sustainability into outreach work. There is also often a lack of co-ordination between different parts of the education sector on sustainability.

The approach

One effective way of doing this is to link courses to community engagement activities. By working with local employers and community organizations students can get more meaningful work experience. The project has focused on the benefits of linking up schools, colleges and universities. South Thames has liaised with Kingston University and the 4 schools in Furzedown to show how both institutions and the local community can benefit from a co-ordinated approach. The students are working with experts in their field of study – construction, hair and beauty and media. A high quality video was produced which has been important for disseminating the work.



south thames
college

incorporating Merton College

Profile

- FE College
- 20,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 950 staff
- Urban

Winner's case study

Our goals

To show how South Thames College can integrate education for sustainable development through an imaginative approach to community engagement. To show how 'employability' and 'sustainability' can be given meaning to students through relevant work experience activities linked to their existing programmes of study.

Obstacles and solutions

Obstacles	Solutions
Developing the capacity to co-ordinate a wide range of activities	Funding was obtained from the Greener Jobs Alliance and the Learning Skills and Improvement Service to employ a co-ordinator. The GJA is a trade union based organization funded by Battersea and Wandsworth TUC and this support has been vital in illustrating how unions can initiate local as well as national sustainability initiatives.
Maintaining the interest of staff and students	Support from senior management was vital in getting buy-in from within the institution. An ESD working group was established with senior management representation.
Keeping a large alliance of organisations together	The emphasis was on practical activities that people could see a benefit in. The college is spread across 2 boroughs – Merton and Wandsworth – both of which have a number of environmental activists who were crucial for the effective implementation of the project.

Performance and results

- Developing a partnership model and setting up the Furzedown Low Carbon Zone (FLCZ)
- Promoting energy efficiency by working with Climate Energy. In the FLCZ approx 900 visits were completed with 95% implementation of some form of efficiency measure
- Promoting solar pv. 6 households had installations that generated £1,000 for the FLCZ
- Promoting environmental literacy. Working with TTT led to the training of 50 residents in the community
- Effective links with schools. An energy audit has been conducted and implementation of 8 sustainability measures scheduled for 2013
- A series of meetings and email updates to the local community plus a link on the community website
- 4 students from Electrical Installation and Heating + Ventilation engaged with local employers
- A video of the above which has received over 1,000 hits and been used in training programmes

Section 3

Lessons learned

- Need to make it central to current priorities. The focus on teaching and learning and new requirements under the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework should be the focus for this type of work. This means it stands a greater chance of being accepted within the institution rather than as a 'bolt-on' that can't be accommodated.
- Highlighting the community element also addresses an increasingly important component of an institution's strategic direction.

Winner's case study

- The importance of alliances in maintaining momentum and providing capacity. Trades union can play a pivotal role in this but are often overlooked by organisations seeking to engage with stakeholders in institutions and the community.
- Need to mainstream ESD with an emphasis on employability

Sharing your project

The project has been extensively communicated both within and outside the sector. It was referenced in a response by LSIS to the Government Task Force on sustainability skills. It has been disseminated at a number of events in the college. It has been the subject of meetings in the local community. The video has been posted on YouTube and the UCU site. It has been presented at 2 national conferences run by the Trades Union Congress and a European conference organized by the European TUC. It has also featured in a Labour Research Department pamphlet and European Trade Union Institute publications. It will be the subject of workshops at an LSIS Regional event in March and college events and the EAUC annual conference in April.

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

Sue Rimmer, Principal of South Thames College said

"Winning the Green Gown Award is a real boost to the education for sustainable development work of South Thames College. Our partnership with employers, trades unions and local community organisations has now been recognised as a model for the FE sector in promoting sustainability skills. A special thanks to the Learning Skills and Improvement Service and the Greener Jobs Alliance for funding support. We look forward to the next stage of linking our student work experience programme with the Furzedown Low Carbon Zone project."

The award has given the project fresh impetus and generated a lot of interest both locally and nationally. It has greatly assisted the development of the next phase of the community engagement work during 2013.

Further information

Furzedown Community Network - <http://www.furzedown.net/lowcarbon.php>

Project video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNRx6tNFG8U>

Project Dirt site - <http://www.projectdirt.com/project/7792/>

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