

Finalist's case study

City University London Student Engagement Green Dragons

Section 1 About the project

Summary

Green Dragons is an innovative institution wide campaign, giving teams of City students an opportunity to obtain funding for collaborative sustainability projects. The different teams compete for funding by producing a video and a simple business case for their proposal. Proposals are appraised against various sustainability themes such as energy and emissions reduction, water reduction and ethical procurement. Students are also welcome to come up with any sustainability idea that has an impact on the university and/or the local community. Proposals are hosted on the Green Dragons website (www.green-dragons.co.uk) where students from across the university are able to pledge and support. Once a pledge limit has been reached the funds are made available for the delivery of the project.

Project partners

City professional staff members, i.e. Environment team, Students' Union, Enterprise Office, Careers' and Development team, Marketing team and academics support Green Dragons project, making it the first time that so many different partners collaborate on sustainability at City. Not-for-profit organizations such as the Vegetarian Society, Client Earth and CRISP charity have supported/mentored students' projects.

Section 2 The results

The problem

In 2011 the University commissioned a survey in association with the NUS: "Insight into student and staff environmental attitudes, behaviours and the impact of existing schemes". The survey clearly demonstrated that the level of awareness and engagement with sustainability campaigns and initiatives amongst students was significantly lower than that of staff. Green Dragons project supports activities that facilitate pro-environmental behaviours and empowerment. There was a demand for this type of project at City University London. Over 500 students are registered as interested in volunteering, and 210 Students are signed up as Environmental Champions with the University.



Profile

- HE
- 17,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 150 staff
- Urban

Category supported by



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The approach

Our approach is consistent with DEFRA's work on changing behaviour through policy making: Encourage – Enable – Exemplify – Engage. Our approach meets student demand and provides the circumstances for students to convert existing or new pro-environmental attitudes into positive, habit-changing behaviours. The crowd sourcing element of the challenge maximises participation by demonstrating to the student body how they can make a difference as individuals. The process of seeking and making pledges helps kick-start behavioural change from a very early stage. Pledges are also used as part of the overall project evaluation to demonstrate impact.

Our goals

- To create a peer-to-peer project that facilitates a positive change in students' attitudes and behaviours towards the environment and sustainability.
- Assist the Students' Union and University with delivering on the environmental strategic objectives, including in the areas of staff and student engagement and curriculum.
- Utilize a series of student-led sustainability projects as a mechanism to provide students with transferable skills such as leadership, entrepreneurship and to increase employability.
- Demonstrate the broader advantages of engaging students as community builders and leaders of change to secure future funding of the challenge.
- Encourage entrepreneurship
- Promote Education for Sustainable Development

Obstacles and solutions

Attract initial attention and establish the project	Identification of strategic partners in the university and the community. Strategic communication. Understanding "students". Participation in national and international initiatives.
Work more collaboratively for utmost engagement and results	Creation of Sustainability Leaders programme including both Green Impact and Green Dragons. It is a joined up approach allowing the Environment Team and the Students' Union to work closely together
Collection of Monitor and Evaluation data from students' projects	Integration of Green Impact "workbook" structure to Green Dragons as a monitor and evaluation tool
Give more opportunities to staff champions and promote ESD	The redesigned Green Dragons project under Sustainability Leaders also targets staff and academics

Performance and results

More than 4.500 City students and staff have been so far directly/indirectly engaged in Green Dragons project which accounts for about 25% of the university community with 10 student projects so far completed. Based on our qualitative and quantitative research that can be found under [Springer Publications](#), there has been a spillover of sustainable behaviours at the university with the student leaders feeling more empowered. Academics have got actively involved in Green Dragons project. New services have also been introduced to the university through the students' projects, i.e. a reuse scheme and the first eco-lab created by students. Community links, joined up thinking and contribution towards ESD have been some of Green Dragons successes.

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Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

1. Important to have a stakeholder management strategy in place before starting your project
2. Engagement of senior management from the beginning for easier access to development opportunities
3. Better communication of the project's scope to the internal teams and use of participatory approaches to ensure greater commitment

Sharing our project

On a university scale: Through all-student email, Societies' newsletter, The Point and Citywire newsletters, Green Dragons social media and microsite, sabbaticals personal social media accounts, Student Union's website, City University website, City Starters e-book, posters and banners, Student Union's diary and also included in the booklets of the different services in the university, i.e. Welcome brochure, Volunteering brochure etc

On a national scale: The project has been showcased on the HEFCE and NUS homepages and has been presented at the Annual Conference on Education for Sustainable Development London, June 10th 2014
<http://www.esdlondon.co.uk/>

On an International scale: The project has been presented at the 2nd World Symposium on Sustainable Development at Universities, 2014: <http://www.haw-hamburg.de/en/ftz-als/veranstaltungen/wssd-2014/programme-outline.html>. The associated paper is published as a chapter in: Sustainable Development at Universities: New Horizons", Volume 34 of the series Environmental Education, Communication and Sustainability" Springer publications.

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

"City being finalists in the Student Engagement category of the Green Gown Awards is powerful evidence of the University's commitment to sustainability. We are proud to incorporate sustainability in our education of future leaders." Professor Paul Curran, Vice-Chancellor, City University London

Further information

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