

Stepping Up in Sustainability 2012-13

Colchester Institute Case Study



Title of project	Creating a Sustainable Vision and Strategy at Colchester Institute	
Lead partner organisation name and address	Colchester Institute Sheepen Road Colchester Essex CO3 3LL	
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1. Aims of the project	<p>The main aim was to cultivate a sustainable one planet vision throughout Colchester Institute by embedding a sustainable ethos within the management team to be assimilated to all staff, learners and partners. It would include the formation of a sustainability group, development of a strategy and sustainability champions to implement and monitor progress. Several sub aims were developed to help meet this programme objective.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop a collective commitment and understanding of sustainability across senior management (SM) at Colchester Institute.2. Create, implement and embed a vision, strategy and action plan for sustainable development within and across Colchester Institute.3. Through the use of sustainability champions at all sites engage and influence staff and learners, both in the implementation of the organisational strategy and action plan through behavioural change.4. Develop or adopt strategies for assessing and measuring sustainability performance across the organisation so that this information can be used to drive improvements at Colchester Institute.5. Develop channels so that sustainability performance can be shared as a teaching resource with learners and as best practice when engaging with customers, partners and stakeholders. <p>Whilst this project primarily focused on a sustainable vision relating to leadership and organisational capacity it also included developing an overarching framework whereby all directorates and stakeholders were to be engaged.</p>	

<p>2. Situation: Identify the situation or issue that faced you</p>	<p>Although Colchester Institute does have some areas of good practice in terms of sustainability both in organisational practices and in curriculum delivery the college strategic plan makes no mention of sustainability. The existing Environmental policy sat low on the strategic agenda and practises of sustainability across the organisation were often hidden from view. Therefore there was a need to coordinate efforts and implement a sustainable vision for the whole organisation that could be referenced and responded to in the development of future strategies and activities.</p> <p>The SM recognised the cost savings to the organisation that could be achieved through a sound sustainable development vision and strategy. However there was a limited knowledge and understanding of what it meant to be a sustainable educational provider and the benefits that it could bring to the organisation, students, and our local and global communities.</p> <p>Therefore much of the work at Colchester Institute so far has been about enhancing the environment through reducing use of resources such as energy and recycling waste. At the time of the initial bid, work was in progress to develop a future funding strategy ensuring Colchester Institute positioned itself for learners to develop transferrable skills sets in carbon management and sustainability. Although very much engaged with its local community there was a need for Colchester Institute to have an even more strategically focussed engagement programme.</p> <p>So to remain the Further Educational provider of choice in the region Colchester Institute are aware of the added value and importance in becoming an exemplar and the responsibility to ensure all students benefit from a sustainable educational legacy. All this against the backdrop of government funding cuts and a global economic downturn.</p>
<p>3. Task: Define the outcomes you needed to achieve</p>	<p>The outcomes for the project fell into three categories, Ensuring senior management buy in; reigniting the green team and joining up sustainable practises across the organisation; and creating an online resource, a virtual learning environment, to share best practise.</p> <p>Senior Management buy in: the culture at Colchester Institute is that teaching staff do not see themselves as part of an integrated team working alongside senior management. Often it is possible in some organisations for bottom up initiatives to work. Historically at Colchester Institute for such initiatives to succeed senior</p>

management must be fully supportive and take the lead. The 1st step in this journey was to ensure SM knew what it meant to be a sustainable college, not just the ‘wow factor’ or visualisation of certain sustainable credentials. The 2nd step was to obtain SM recognition and support for the journey ahead. 3rd step was for SM to take ownership of a sustainable vision for Colchester Institute. 4th step for SM to lead from the front. The start of this proactive role would be through the endorsement of a sustainability document mapping out Colchester Institute’s overarching strategic objectives.

The reformation of the Green Team was necessary to establish levels of staff commitment on a volunteer role basis. It was also an opportunity for staff to demonstrate what they were doing already and to provide a platform to discuss and find out what further support they required in embedding sustainable practises within their centres. It was also envisaged that this group would set up a forum to express ideas to take to senior management and initiate mini projects.

To be able to benchmark Colchester Institute Sustainability credentials the project team were to review several reporting frameworks and toolkits.

The final objective was to support all staff and students by creating a resource support tool, a virtual learning environment (VLE). This website would encourage ownership and the sharing of best practise through access to blogging mediums and the uploading/downloading of useful tools, web links, case studies and curriculum support materials.

4. Actions that you took in order to achieve your plan, and your approach

In order to achieve the programme’s aim Colchester Institute developed a project plan, this was regularly reviewed by the appointed project lead and a member of the SM team.

LSIS had appointed a mentor to assist Colchester Institute and after an initial meeting the programme aims and objectives were refined. Contact was made to previous members of the Green Team to explain the programme’s aim and objectives and we requested their future involvement as this developed.

In September our LSIS mentor carried out the first of two workshops.

The first workshop was with the SM team and a member from the board of governors. This was an opportunity to understand SM current viewpoint towards sustainability and whether it mattered. We also used this session to define what sustainability meant to Colchester Institute as an educational provider.

The Reaching Forward Index (RFI) proved a valuable tool in this session to establish our starting position. This self-appraisal benchmarked the organisation using the following themes;

Leadership - it identified the need to embed sustainability into appraisals, training, inductions, for management to support activities across the organisation and to establish a working group to manage, support and inspire an action plan supported by a policy document.

Learning – Colchester Institute scored relatively poorly here and highlighted a bridgeable gap between SM and teaching staff. SM were encouraged to be become engaged with the sustainability agenda and a senior member for teaching and learning to lead on the development within the curriculums. Also for the organisation to appoint sustainability champions in all areas to inspire and support activities across the organisation.

Organisational Capacity – the appraisal identified that there must be evidence of a strong level of involvement between curriculum and estates and ensure appropriate monitoring and recording measures are in place. To communicate to all stakeholders and the wider community our sustainable activities.

Partnerships – here it encouraged for the organisation to have a strong awareness of the potential benefits of partnerships. Sustainability champions and those working with external agencies should work closely together to identify and maximise partnership opportunities

The 1st workshop also allowed us to discuss what was potentially needed within a policy document including a strategic three and ten year vision.

In between these workshops Student Services organised a Green Themed Week whereby we engaged students through various methods such as the ClCO₂ Save Energy Information Stand and an Energy Mascot Competition.

The 2nd workshop enabled us to review the draft policy document. The draft policy document had been co-authored and was extremely

disjointed and did not reflect the strategic aims as set out in the RFI report. From this point forward the RFI was instrumental in providing the framework and guidance for the eventual Sustainable Vision document. It was also a conscience decision to steer away from a policy format and for it to read as a narrative of our vision and journey towards sustainability. The afternoon session focussed on Curriculum staff and the resources required to embedding sustainability into the curriculum.

Meetings with the Sustainability Champions were held on a bi monthly basis. Unfortunately the numbers attending this volunteer group were not as high as anticipated. The Sustainability Champions are now a group of six committed staff none of which are from teaching curriculums. The snow blindness of emails, pressures of teaching and structural management changes meant that the call for volunteers had been treated with apathy. Also the team had little autonomy to effect change. Despite this members of the Sustainability team met to discuss how best to join up sustainable practises across the organisation. The virtual learning environment was an agreed way to do this. One specific project that one of our Sustainability Champions embraced was the creation of an inter college, university competition to encourage the creation of a usable building product through refuse materials. We are looking for expressions of interest from institutions who would like to be part of this exciting yearlong project. It was eagerly awaited that the newly endorsed Sustainable Vision Document would add some weight and direction behind the steering group.

The new Sustainable Vision document was constructed by one author using resources from the Excellence Gateway as suggested by the RFI index. It also drew on guidance from the Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC) and Ofsted. It followed the RFI themes and took on board the feedback from the workshop sessions and RFI generated report. These influences have developed within the document a practical overarching framework towards sustainability. This document was also injected with famous quotes and a narrative of 'our journey so far'. The document was reviewed by our Sustainability Champions, selected students on Higher Education programmes and our LSIS mentor. It was also appraised in the light of other policies from exemplar Institutions through a College consortium steering group the 'East of England Regional Sustainability Network.' The SM prepared the mission statement to accompany the vision document and was endorsed on the 19th March 2013 by the SM and Board of Governors.

The Project's lead evaluated several sustainability reporting toolkits

this included ISO 14001, the Global Reporting Initiative, Halstar and the Green League.

In the meantime some of our sustainability champions worked on the construction of a sustainability learning portal. This was accessible through Colchester Institute's Moodle pages for staff and students. It was used to trial the format and content of the pages within the Moodle platform. However as it was embedded within Colchester Institutes main learning environment it was felt the prominence and accessibility could be enhanced. The look normally associated with such a VLE under CI's narrow format was also uninspiring. The project team felt this was an opportunity to push some organisational boundaries. With approval from SM it was proposed to construct a 'public facing' Moodle online resource with a website feel. This website would be accessible to all colleges, universities and wider communities to share best practise. We used many of the piloted resources on our initial sustainability Moodle pages but by using the latest version of Moodle we were able to break away from prescriptive formats. The name for this new public facing VLE was democratically chosen - www.preciouearth.org.uk. No registration or password is needed to access any of the online materials.

We wanted to share the high and lows of our journey to date through an LSIS dissemination event. Unfortunately the event was not attended by as many external organisations as we had wished for. However we had also opened the event up to Colchester Institute staff and we were pleasantly surprised by the level of interest shown throughout the days drop in / out sessions. We were able to demonstrate some of our best practises and share experiences with Oaklands College. On this day we also officially launched www.preciouearth.org.uk . We had several guest speakers external and internal on this day demonstrating sustainable practises within an FE college. The greatest lesson learnt from the event was the need for increased cooperation not just within Colchester Institute but across the whole sector. We hope the new VLE will encourage all to share sustainable practises in both the curriculum and administration. So we become not just individual exemplars, but as a Sector an exemplar to the wider community.

5. Results that you obtained

The programme aims were all met. Some we know are work in progress others exceeded expectations.

Senior Management buy-in – this had taken longer than expected but this was not unexpected due to structural changes within the Senior Management Team and the economic pressures brought upon by government cuts. The approval of the Sustainable Vision Document slipped several times but was finally endorsed on the 19th March 2013. This can be accessed at the following link:

<http://www.preciousearth.org.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=31>

1. There is now Senior Management commitment to implement the aims and ambitions of Colchester Institutes Sustainable Vision
2. Directorate policies will now be created within Colchester Institutes Sustainable Vision framework
3. Various funding bids have been supported by the Sustainable Vision Document.
4. As of the 17th April 2013 a member of the Senior Management Team will lead the Sustainability Champions group and the meetings will become a fulcrum for action.
5. 'Staff and student inductions will now include information with regarding sustainable practises across the organisation and a personal commitment (Staff and Learner agreement forms) towards embracing these. Facilities Management and the campus estate will aid this by becoming vehicles for knowledge transfer.' - *Gary Horne Finance Director at Colchester Institute*

Engaging staff and learners through the use of our Sustainability Champions has not been fully realised. This is due to several reasons; the lack of an appointed Sustainability Managers role within the organisation; the time constraints our volunteers experience in their current job roles; and the lack of recognition and definitive projects in their duties as Sustainability Champions. The Sustainable Vision Document recognises this and stipulates several actions for the Senior Management Team to implement. However across Colchester Institute certain curriculums centres are managing to embed Sustainable teaching elements within their programmes, we just need to shout a little louder about it. It is envisaged the Sustainable

Moodle learning environment will encourage departments to share such resources and their methods of inclusion. By having such a support mechanism it is hoped it will enable teaching staff to use these resources within their curriculums and that it will ease the impact of session preparation.

The Moodle VLE was never envisaged to be public facing. The project aims far exceeded expectations here. With help from the Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges and other supportive bodies it will become an avenue to share best practise. In time we hope this toolkit will inspire all to embrace Sustainability in the Education Sector - *'our responsibility to educate and act in a way that will sustain life and promote harmony between people and the environment, to encourage present and future generations to embrace their responsibility to maintain earth's finite resources.'* Colchester Institute's agreed definition.

There is a raised recognition from staff with regards the Sustainability agenda. However staff development sessions will be required to build on this over the summer.

6. What made the project a success? What were the key ingredients?

There were some fundamental reasons behind the successes of this project. A big thank you to our LSIS mentor Andrea Gewessler who was proactive throughout the programme and Gary Horne Colchester Institute Finance Director who became the projects advocate at SM level.

Another success to the project was the committed core of Sustainability Champions who have continued to pursue mini sustainable projects across the organisation since the steering group's inception. Also Staff at Colchester Institute who have implemented sustainable practises within the curriculum and across the campus already.

Having a strategic three and ten year vision embracing issues surrounding sustainability is key in forging a path from any starting position. The workshops proved invaluable in focussing the projects aim and objectives especially in defining what sustainability meant to Colchester Institute as an organisation and our earthly responsibilities as an educational establishment. The resources provided by LSIS were instrumental in constructing a strategic framework of our Sustainable Vision. The RFI was especially helpful in this regard. From the RFI and subsequent meetings with our Sustainability Champions the initial appraisal did not represent Colchester Institute's true starting point. We would recommend in conducting this first self-appraisal that Curriculum, Facilities and Administrative Management are involved along with Senior

	<p>Management.</p> <p>It has been realised that Sustainability Champion meetings need to define progress and have specific action plans that volunteers can take ownership of. These plans must be specific and map out project milestones not just ‘can someone look at this for the group please.’ Direct contact/visitation is required with curriculum centres heads and lecturers and this takes considerable time. An example of this is the recent working brief given to BA (Hons) Graphic Design students by our Sustainability Champions to prepare a new energy awareness campaign and to professionally produce the Sustainability Vision Document. The results were outstanding.</p> <p>Another key success was adopting the narrative approach in creating a document that staff could relate to. One that explained what we are aiming for and what needed to be done rather than a policy shopping list.</p>
<p>7. What would you say were the most important things you learned from this project, which you will take forward as an individual or as an organisation in your sustainability journey?</p>	<p>There are six key steps to becoming a sustainable organisation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define what sustainability means to your organisation and thereby realise the responsibilities both to your stakeholders and the wider global community. 2. Have a workable but ambitious vision and committed management team 3. Inspire and engage stakeholders by providing support and committing resources 4. Celebrate and share the successes and failures with all 5. Break down the barriers to non-cooperation. This means face to face communications and a willingness to share information across all levels. Even within the East of England Regional Sustainability Network there is a reluctance to do this. 6. The quickest way towards achieving sustainable best practise is to learn from others whatever sector or country you find it in.

8. Any resources or tools produced by the project	Please see www.preciouearth.org.uk within this website there are resources and links for both administrative and teaching materials. Please feel free to contribute to the site. If you wish to then we will set up some administrative permissions. Please contact stephen.hammond@colchester.ac.uk		
9. Total costs of the project	LSIS funding	Match funding	Total funding
	£9750		£9750

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