

# Finalist's case study

## De Montfort University Leicester Student Engagement DMU Square Mile

### Section 1 About the project

#### Summary

De Montfort University's Square Mile programme is working in partnership with the community to deliver 40 innovative projects that aim to tackle a range of challenges affecting all walks of life.

From raising aspirations and attainment in schools, to identifying people with diabetes, or teaching IT to pensioners, DMU is connecting thousands of people living nearby with Higher Education activities.

#### Project partners

A range of local and national partners work with our students, staff and local community to deliver a range of projects, these include:

- Hewlett Packard (IT4Free)
- MacMillan Cancer (IT4Free & Stem Cell)
- Anthony Nolan (Stem Cell drives)
- Diabetes UK (Diabetes research projects)
- Action Deafness (Free hearing screenings)

### Section 2 The results

#### The problem

The Square Mile programme commenced back in 2011, at this time it was by the Executive board that more could be done to showcase the skills and expertise of De Montfort's staff and students, in a way that would benefit local communities in Leicester.

#### The approach

Square Mile was launched in 2011, with all projects in the Square Mile programme adhering to a set of principles:

- Academic staff ideas responding to community need.
- Students deliver and lead on projects.
- Projects are delivered in partnership with community groups and organisations.



#### Profile

Example:

- HEI
- 23,440 students (includes full and part time students)
- 2500 staff
- Urban

Category supported by



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## Our goals

There are a number of project objectives divided across three areas:

**Staff:** To engage and support academic staff to participate in public and community engagement activities. In particular, connecting staff with local communities to create projects and form local partnerships.

**Students:** To encourage students to work with academic staff on projects that will benefit local communities. To provide students with innovative community based projects that enhance their employability, whilst also allowing them to form lasting relationships with local communities.

**Community:** Design projects in partnership with communities that respond to their needs. Continue to involve the community as stakeholders to allow projects to grow organically creating a lasting legacy.

## Obstacles and solutions

<p><b>Sustainability</b> – More than just “Financial, how could we ensure projects remained relevant to communities and created a “Legacy”?”</p>	<p>Emphasis placed on students delivering projects, time constraints meant that academics delivering projects on their own would have been unsustainable in a number of ways. By embedding community based projects into course modules, this allowed students to fit community engagement into their time table, providing accessible opportunities and given students the platform develop a passion for supporting local communities.</p>
<p><b>Project evolution</b> – How could we keep projects relevant to both the community and the institution?</p>	<p>Ongoing dialogue with community stakeholders, staff and students. Consultation session held with all parties, to identify new ideas and areas where projects could develop.</p>

## Performance and results

1000 Students have taken part in over 40 projects in 2013/14:

- Through mentoring and after-school clubs, 200 students worked with more than 1,000 children and helped at one primary school move from Special Measures to Good in its Ofsted inspection grading.
- IT4Free has helped hundreds of people learn about technology and increase their computer literacy with the support of 10 staff and around 50 trained students.
- 40 students working on diabetes support projects have helped hundreds of people. In particular, identifying 140 people who did not know they had the illness and referred them for NHS treatment.
- DMU students working with Anthony Nolan recruited more than 2,500 16-30-year-olds to the NHS stem cell register in the course of 18 months. Leading to two matches so far for people suffering from blood cancer
- DMU Square Mile Injury Minimization Programme in Schools (I.M.P.S), delivered by 30 nursing students, taught 400 children the basics of first aid.

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- Free Hearing Tests saw 30 audiology students work with charity Action Deafness to give 100 people hearing tests, referring a fifth of that number onto the NHS for further tests.

## Section 3 The future

### Lessons learned

Successful student engagement in projects requires a number of different elements:

**Accessibility:** Fitting projects around timetables and embedding projects into modules is essential

**Continued engagement:** Support structure for student engagement projects must be in place (logistics, equipment etc.), projects must offer something different to entice students to take part.

**Stories:** Give students involved in your project a chance to tell their participation stories, easy way to do this is via social media or blog.

**Empowerment:** Projects should empower students and give them the chance to lead on specific areas, in the process developing their skills and enhancing their passion for a particular cause.

**Peer promotion:** Students promoting to their peers that a particular project is worth their time, is the most effective form of marketing.

### Sharing our project

DMU Square Mile has promoted its concept through a range of presentations to external bodies and fellow HEI's, currently the project team are in the process of advising HEFCE on how Universities can effectively engage with communities. In addition to presenting at conferences, Square Mile has a blog for staff, students and community groups to access, as well as external visitors to get a feel for the projects and see how the concept works In practice (<http://dmusquaremile.our.dmu.ac.uk/>)

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

To be a finalist in the Green Gown Awards for two out of the past 3 years is a fantastic achievement for De Montfort as an institution. It is a real reward for our students, our staff and partners that work incredibly hard to deliver projects that bring real change to communities in Leicester.

### Further information

Web: <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/about-dmu/dmu-square-mile/dmu-square-mile.aspx>

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