

University of Huddersfield Sustainability Champion

Emily Rye

Section 1 About the project

Summary

Emily has been a pioneer for the University; as the first environmental employee, carving a place for sustainability, generating University-wide interest, and determinedly driving the green agenda. In her 7 years as Environmental Coordinator she has surpassed expectations for her role to make a massive impact to the University's sustainability effort, driving programmes on the ground and initiating changes that have led to a wider shift in organisational values.

Project partners

A natural collaborator, Emily has networked widely and relies on strong partnerships to achieve goals, from tackling furniture reuse with Estates and Procurement colleagues, to partnering with Kirklees Council to achieve Fairtrade Borough status. Emily has strived to embed sustainability skillfully promoting issues and engaging senior colleagues in dialogue on topics from sustainable catering to ethical investment. Emily co-convened the Education for Sustainable Development Forum, in order to build relationships and increase the visibility of sustainability issues with academic colleagues.

Section 2 The results

The problem

Emily arrived at an ambitious university focused on delivering an inspiring student experience, yet there was no sustainability programme. In setting out to address this Emily has not been afraid to push herself forward and take on work in a more senior arena – for example proposing the University's first environmental policy, which has since acted as a key reference point for the University community and a starting point for all following environmental strategies, plans and activities, many of these also delivered by Emily.

The approach

Emily is convinced sustainability is as much about people and politics as it is ecology and the environment, and it is this that drives Emily to prioritise communication and engagement through all of her work, taking a very broad and holistic approach that encompasses as many as possible – trying to connect widely, meaningfully and collegially. This approach has enabled Emily to achieve a profound impact without the benefit of established governance structures or the usual support mechanisms in place.

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HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

Profile

- HEI
- 22,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 1800 staff
- Urban

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Our goals

Emily has changed the University's strategy, values and ethos. Emily strived for and demonstrated a more sustainable way of doing business through initiatives, promotions and engagement of colleagues. Seven years on the University has now changed how it sees itself – most significantly the University strategy now recognises environmental sustainability as an enabling factor for its success, and the Teaching and Learning strategy has a formal commitment to delivering sustainability education.

Obstacles and solutions

Harnessing widespread resources	Accepting that resources may be disparate, rather than immediately available as dedicated budgets and teams. Learning to recognise and locate opportunities, working with whatever is available, but being flexible as the situation can change frequently.
Developing an integrated approach	Without a direct link to students, it can be challenging for Estates teams to engage students in sustainability programmes long term. Setting up the ESD Forum has created an avenue for reaching students through their academic leaders, raising visibility of campus sustainability issues, and gathering feedback. Likewise academics can develop sustainability topics defined as most University-relevant within the curriculum.
Senior Management engagement	As with impressing any new idea on people, this takes time and persistence. Connecting with the right people can help accelerate the journey – don't just keep battling upwards, but look sideways too. Involving colleagues from different areas of the University who may be in a better position to spearhead messages at senior level. Academic colleagues can offer a powerful voice and help present a different perspective.

Performance and results

Emily's multi-dimensional and inclusive approach has resulted in a large number of wide-ranging impacts for the university, as recognised by her recent Vice-Chancellor's Sustainability Champion Award, including:

- Waste – delivery of waste programmes, resulting in 6th best recycling rate and 8th best waste mass out of UK Universities (EMR 2013); revision of waste tender and support for furniture reuse saving £50k pa.
- Sustainable Travel – initiatives achieving a 24% reduction in 'car alone' travel to campus since 2009, roughly 440 fewer journeys per day; development of travel schemes for c.200 staff (10% of workforce).
- Energy reduction – devised the concept for an energy challenge campaign to launch this autumn; developing customer-focused energy consumption information for Schools and Services
- Fairtrade University – championing Fairtrade has increased campus sales of Fairtrade products to almost £450k (it was zero 10 years ago!); 3 successful Fairtrade status renewals.
- Fairtrade Kirklees – kick-started this project, developing an action plan that achieved Fairtrade Borough status in just 18 months and led to Fairtrade being embedded in Council procurement policies
- Education - co-convened the Education for Sustainable Development Forum, resulting in the introduction of sustainability into University strategy and a University-wide Sustainability Review.
- Community engagement - delivered sustainability focused events for hundreds of local school children.
- External promotion – initiated environmental programmes that catapulted the University up the Green League and into press headlines in one year, maintaining a First Class Award for five years running.

www.green gown awards.org.uk

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Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

- 1 Whatever your position in an organisation, even from a less senior role you can make a significant impact and instigate positive change. Make the first move and open dialogue with key colleagues – although you can't force issues, you can help people understand the relevance of sustainability topics to their area, upon which they may be increasingly motivated to take the lead themselves.
- 2 Even if unsure of all the likely outcomes, don't be afraid to have a go and try new ideas, working within your organisation's systems. Even when things don't go entirely to plan, this can help shape a better version or spark the next brilliant idea – the important thing is to make a start.
- 3 Small steps combined with a sustained effort over time, can amount to a significant difference on sustainability. It's been said before, but sustainability projects require endless patience and tenacity, so it's helpful to recognise and celebrate every small win as a step in the right direction.

Sharing our project

Emily has communicated widely the University's experiences implementing sustainability programmes, both within the organisation (University Committees, 50-strong Sustainability Forum) and in the community and wider sector (local press articles, forums, sector consultations). Above all, the changes Emily initiated have led to the introduction of sustainability into the new Teaching and Learning Strategy which will see sustainability issues communicated to over 100,000 students, tomorrow's professionals, in the next five years.

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

While reviewing our University Strategy recently, one item that continually topped the agenda at consultations was sustainability. It matters to our management team, to our staff and our students. Emily's efforts on the ground supporting this have made a massive difference to the University and deserve individual recognition. As a Green Gown Finalist Emily believes she has demonstrated that environmental professionals at all levels can make headway tackling sustainability issues and be recognised for their work, even without the advantages of large budgets, teams of dedicated staff or senior level authority.

Further information

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