

# Finalist's case study

## Keele University Student's Union

### Social Responsibility

## KeeleSU Fashion Show: Sustainable Fashion

### Section 1 About the project

#### Summary

The KeeleSU Fashion Show: Sustainable Fashion was established in May 2013, after the collapse of the Rana Plaza Complex in Dakar, Bangladesh. This tragedy sent shock waves through our student population who had been regular shoppers at many of the stores involved. A group of students came to the SU with the idea of showing people the real breath of ethical clothing available in the UK and to raise awareness of the issue of unethical labour conditions and environmentally damaging manufacturing. This year's campaign was based around lobbying high street manufacturers to raise the price of their clothes by just 50p, which would raise labour conditions and wages in clothes factories to a much more ethical standard.

#### Project partners

The project was from the outset strongly supported by Keele University, who helped organize the event with KeeleSU. In the lead up to the Fashion Shows, they ran clothes swapping, stalls and awareness campaigns both within the SU and at the Sustainability Hub Building. The events were also strongly supported by the Newcastle-under-Lyme Fairtrade Group, who led this year's 50p campaign. This year we gained a local sponsor Embassy Hair Salon in Newcastle-Under-Lyme who styled our models using non-animal tested products. Furthermore, we had over 80 ethical stalls and contributors donated clothes to the show, ranging from big names such as Weleda and Nomads to small local shops such as Wikijum Fairtrade Clothing and Lymestone Brewery.

A full list of contributors and stallholders can be viewed at:

<http://keelesu.com/activities/fashionshow/companies/> and

<http://keelesu.com/activities/fashionshow/stallholders/>

### Section 2 The results

#### The problem

The problem we were trying to challenge was based around the consumer habits of people in the UK, especially around cheap clothing and perceptions of ethical clothing. Many people were put off by ethical and environmentally friendly clothing as they assumed it was overpriced and very difficult to find on our high streets. Therefore we wanted to remove some of these barriers to purchasing ethical clothing by showing our community the sheer breadth of ethical items available on the market and make them think seriously about where their clothes come from and the human cost of cheap clothing.



#### Profile

- HEI
- 11,591 students (includes full and part time students)
- 75 permanent staff, 112 student staff
- Rural Village Campus

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## The approach

Our approach was based around creating one national event, representing as many ethical and environmental clothing companies as we could. Our approach was not so much about getting the retailers to come to Keele (due to the carbon footprint), but more about getting information and items of clothing from those retailers via the post and putting them on our catwalks. We first looked at getting in touch with small-scale companies who were trying to establish themselves and local Staffordshire based organizations. Our stallholders therefore came from the local vicinity, 25 stalls coming from Staffordshire. We allowed just two national organizations to come to the show. These were, newly established 'Silverstick Apparel' and 'Nature is Beautiful Cosmetics', who wanted to launch themselves at the event. Both came by public transport from London. Although the event was primarily aimed at the student population, we also wanted to make sure staff and the local community attended the event, and offered a reduced rate to staff. We also had articles written about the event in three local newspapers to raise awareness of the campaign, beyond event.

## Our goals

Our main goal was to change people's perceptions to ethical clothing and make them think more deeply about their consumer habits and where their clothes come from. We wanted people to realize that even small changes to their purchasing habits could make a real positive impact on the environment and workers in factories across the globe. We made sure the event had a strong and realistic campaign; for example, in the first year it was about trying to buy Fairtrade goods. In the second year about lobbying the high street companies into putting a 50p increase onto their clothing prices that goes directly to the manufacturer.

## Obstacles and solutions

Receiving Donations of Clothing	Asking for smaller donations of one or two items, instead of large quantities. We made sure it was a reciprocal relationship and to advertise their donations.
Recruiting and training models	4-5 training sessions given for the student models with a trained choreographer.
Getting students to design handmade recycled clothes	Trained fashion designer and Scrapshack staff came in to lead design sessions.
Legacy-making sure the impact of the show continues	To continue the legacy of the show, we have monthly ethical and environmental meetings to discuss the agenda set for the show, such as staff uniform policies.

## Performance and results

The main result was an increased focus on sustainability from both students and the staff at the SU, who have become more interested in their ethical social responsibility. We now have an online ethical clothing shop for Society/Club kits; a new staff uniform policy and we have increased the amount of fairtrade clothing in our shop. We also now have monthly ethical and environmental meetings, instead of them being once a year and Sustainability is now one of nine key themes in the 2015-2020 KeeleSU Strategic Plan. The Fashion Show has become an established event in our annual calendar. We also found many of our students and staff continued relationships with the companies involved after the event, becoming models and staff members for their businesses. 7 Keele students became models for the House of Vinny and Twenty Six People and an SU staff member blogged of his adventures cycling around the UK, through Silverstick Active Apparel sponsorship.

## Section 3 The future

### Lessons learned

The main things we learnt is that sustainability can fit into all areas of our daily living; the event opened the door to even more sustainability based events and activities within our department. Our department has now been recruited as Sustainability Champions for the SU. For example, just this week our department is leading talks to external bodies and staff members about the opportunities available in environmental volunteering and as Green Student Academic Representatives in each school of the University. You tend to find such a large event becomes a catalyst to further change and make students and staff more engaged with the topic. As individuals, it has made us all think differently about our own behavior and we now try and behave in a more sustainable manner.

The fashion industry ended up being the best way to engage the largest amount of people, especially those who may not usually think about the ethical and environmental aspects of clothing. Once they were at the event they really engaged with the topic and we had over 100 people sign the petition to increase the national price of clothing by 50p. We found the event to be a positive way to engage a large group of people into a challenging topic in a light and fun manner. One of major issues was the timing of the event. We have now trialed the event in March, and May, but struggled to avoid exam periods or tie it into the February based Green Week. This year, we are putting the event in our university's RAG week in mid-March, to avoid exam periods and student elections. We have also learnt to not ask for too much from the companies. Most have very limited marketing budgets and they could not offer us huge amounts of stock; however we started to ask for 1 or 2 items and for returns or seconds that were often disposed of due to very small errors. The businesses were often happy to send these to us and filled our catwalk without leaving the companies out of pocket. We also found that offering a goody bag of samples and vouchers and running raffles and competitions increased our footfall to the second event.

### Sharing our project

The project received the local attention of the Stoke 'Sentinel' Newspaper who came to interview our models on 3 occasions. We also had 3 local professional photographers come to shoot the 2013/2014 event. Our university magazine, Concourse, wrote 2 articles for the event. The show also appeared on online event websites in the area. On top of that we were lucky in that all our contributors advertised the event for us on their websites and social media feeds. Word of mouth, however was our best way of sharing the project. The project is frequently discussed at events and conferences we host and this year we led a talk about the project at an HEA Workshop based at Keele, which was well attended by staff from other HEI and FE institutions.

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

**Bolu Oyewale, Keele Graduate, Former Fashion Show Model and KeeleSU President 2014/2015:** "It has been a huge honour and certainly encouraging to be short-listed for this prestigious award. We have strived for many years to be recognized for our ethical and environmental projects here at KeeleSU and the Fashion Show now represents a real positive change in mentality within our institution. This vindicates our strategic direction and commitment to sustainability, showcasing that where institutions take sustainability seriously, it really does bring positive impacts, to the institution, staff, students, and the wider community. Being short-listed for the Social Responsibility Award, has made us re-evaluate the impact of such an event on our local community and its success has given us the push we needed to make this event an established project within KeeleSU's annual calendar, motivating staff and student engagement. Being a finalist has also given us a platform to further promote our work and sustainability agenda, increasing sustainability awareness."





Green Gown

Awards 2014

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## Further information

Webpage for the Fashion Show- <https:// Keelesu.com/activities/fashionshow/>

Companies involved this year- <https:// Keelesu.com/activities/fashionshow/companies/>

Stallholders involved this year- <https:// Keelesu.com/activities/fashionshow/stallholders/>