

Student Engagement Events

Events are important in engaging students with sustainability, allowing them to develop an understanding and appreciation for sustainability ideas which may influence how they live now, as well as actions within their future personal and professional lives.

General Event Planning

- Generating a sense of shared ownership is essential. Involving motivated students in the planning stages can strengthen the event for both content (making it relatable) and promotion (students have own streams of contacts). Work with Student Associations/Unions, Clubs/Societies/Sports Teams, Class Representatives etc, as well as individuals.
- Grouping events under a common (popular) theme can be an effective way to encourage repeat engagement.
- National campaigns do not tend to do as well as localised or specific independent campaigns.
- Event programmes need to be well balanced, with both large and small events. Large events tend to impact in terms of sharing information. Smaller events are more effective at influencing personal change, as attendees feel part of the discussion and have in-depth conversations around the issues.



Timing

- Timing is key as there are busy periods in the academic year.
- Most institutions have events calendars which are useful for promotion as well as showing busy periods.
- Although avoiding busy periods is advisable, related events may be successful (e.g. stress relieving activities that can also carry a sustainability and social responsibility message at exam time).

Communications

- Events calendars, notice boards and social media streams are busy so make your events stand out!
- Research from some institutions shows posters are effective and appreciated. Students can be asked to design artwork for these posters.
- Climate change art or photography is an impactful means of promotion.
- Promoting events to your social media followers mean you are only reaching those already engaged. Try to reach new people and groups:
 - ◇ Linking your activities with faculties will help gather more hype. If events are only promoted through sustainability channels audience is limited, but each faculty may have their own communications streams.
 - ◇ Linking events to the curriculum is a fruitful way of ensuring attendance. These can be promoted through the course leaders and reach a wide audience.
 - ◇ Paying for promoted posts on Facebook and Twitter is particularly useful for targeting specific new audiences. The cost of this can start at just a few pounds.

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Event Format

- Making events interactive has proved to be very successful. Some institutions use live polling software that keeps attendees engaged throughout but also gathers feedback that can be used in future planning.
- Online events could be trailed, but often students enjoy the a social element of in-person events.
- Climate change art or photography can be harnessed for powerful emotional impact.

Event Content

- Most institutions have social, environmental and ethical goals in their core strategies and action plans, and these can and should be linked in and promoted through the event.
- Giving out free food is always popular!
- Specific event examples:
 - ◇ Holding a 'Welcome' event with a presentation to make sure students are aware of sustainability as soon as they join the institution is important. It may be helpful to start with the bleak picture of the damage to the earth then share how they can become involved in institutional change, linking this to societies and training etc.
 - ◇ 'Soft Landing' initiatives where students are welcomed into their building, whether accommodation or teaching space, and shown how it works, giving them power and responsibility to use it sustainably.
 - ◇ Film viewings are good but it's important to have an interactive element. A better approach is to only put films on that are requested by students as you know there will be an interest in this.
 - ◇ Events around a competition, such as a halls energy reduction competition, can work well.
 - ◇ Participating in fairs can raise awareness of what you do and ways to get involved, e.g. Fresher's Fayre, Green Week. Make sure there are engaging things to encourage visitors, such as freebies/activities/competitions.
 - ◇ A Dissertation Mixer (networking event) is a good way to link students with academics and local sustainability organisations, with a similar format possible for Living Lab type projects.
 - ◇ A more direct approach to engagement is to have 'Engagement Officers' circulating, e.g. on moving-in day to discuss how residents can live more sustainably and get involved socially in their new home.



Monitoring and Follow-Up

- 'Follow-up' is important to gather engaged students for contact lists who will attend future events
- A lot of feedback from campaigns is qualitative, which can be a problem when trying to measure success.
- Immediate feedback options are the most effective in gathering feedback in terms of getting high response numbers, but also getting the most informative feedback.
- At-event feedback can be gathered by handing out an iPad as the event is closing with simple happy/fine/sad emoji options.
- Live polling software used during events can also provide a valuable source of feedback.