



Green Gown  
Awards 2014

Finalist's case study



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## University of the Arts London Sustainability Champion

Rachel Clowes, Embroidery  
Technician, London College of  
Fashion

### Section 1 About the project

#### Summary

London College of Fashion (LCF) Embroidery Technician, Rachel Clowes, champions sustainability through highly visible interventions that are pertinent to a creative university.

From saving electricity to increasing biodiversity and pioneering the use of organic calico, she engages community members, students and staff from diverse disciplines. Working with the estates team, for example, resulted in a reduction in electricity consumption at our west London site of 78,000 kWh and 39,000 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> over the last 11 months.

Rachel's involvement growing flax and natural dyes with neighborhood groups instills robust local links, whilst replacing over 2,000m of conventional calico with organic decreases insecticide use in our global society. Both initiatives encourage better-informed students who can positively influence the future of fashion.

Rachel demonstrates that sustainable thinking can be embedded in every college role and need not be a top-down directive. Her approach has inspired others to build sustainability into their day-to-day activities, helping to create a strong and supportive college community.

#### Project partners

Rachel has worked with staff and students at multiple UAL sites, including building managers, estates staff, technical teams, academics, administrators, and the LCF Sustainability Coordinator, to improve green spaces; help with the College bee hives; improve ethical procurement policies, including a partial switch to organic calico; and encourage charity reuse schemes.

Rachel has worked with LCF students and staff plus the Cordwainers Community Gardeners and other local neighbourhood groups and schools on a flax growing project. The project has brought different groups together to share knowledge and resources in order to grow a garment within London.



#### Profile

- HEI
- 18,799 students
- 2,333 staff
- Urban

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## Section 2 The results

### The problem

Rachel has been involved in many sustainability projects at UAL, section 2 focuses on three projects that give an overview of her work and approach.

#### Green Spaces

LCF is spread across six central London sites, where green space can be hard to come by. Until recently, many of our sites had only hard landscaping (paving and tarmac), any flora lacked diversity and there were few habitats suitable for wildlife.

#### Calico

Calico is a type of cotton heavily used by LCF students when mocking up garments. Around 15,000 metres of calico are used at LCF each year. WWF figures indicate that although globally 2.4% of cropland is used for cotton, it accounts for 11% and 24% of global pesticide and insecticide sales respectively.

#### Electricity Reduction

12 months ago most students and staff at LCF's Lime Grove site were not engaged with electricity use and hadn't implemented any measures to reduce electricity usage on site.

### The approach

Rachel's approach to sustainability, including the three above projects, is best summed up by Professor Frances Corner's testimonial:

*"Rachel has inspired colleagues at London College of Fashion to engage proactively in sustainability initiatives through collaborative working practices, sharing and celebrating success in a multitude of areas from energy consumption to fabric provision. Rachel uses her skills as an Embroidery Technician, and a creative approach to problem solving, to find imaginative and effective ways of communication such as illustrating energy consumption using a large scale installation made of coloured threads. Rachel has consistently and actively sought to empower individuals at all levels, including myself, to contribute towards making a difference, and my colleagues and I feel proud to work alongside her."*

**Professor Frances Corner - Head of London College of Fashion**

### Our goals

UAL is committed to integrating sustainable and ethical practice into all aspects of college life. Rachel's attitude of embedding sustainability into everyday routines exemplifies this ethos.

Rachel's aim was to seek out opportunities to engage others in reducing waste and improving environments through creative sustainability. Her objectives were to increase biodiversity in our green spaces whilst making them relevant to our curriculum, decrease the reliance on conventional calico and the associated pesticides and insecticides, and to reduce electricity use.

### Obstacles and solutions

Obstacles	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of ownership, interest and perceived relevance of green spaces from staff and students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff and students have been encouraged to grow whatever they like. Staff now grow flowers and vegetables, students grow natural dyes and flax, the UAL Tea Society grows</li> </ul>



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	herbs, and a popular suggestion from everyone for next year is hops!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electricity data can be dull and lacks impact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data was presented in a more emissive and engaging way, using the everyday materials of our students – threads and yarns.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organic calico is perceived to be more expensive with no benefits to students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buying organic calico in wider rolls means it can cost the same as conventional calico per m<sup>2</sup>. Encouraging the use of donated fabrics and demonstrating more efficient pattern cutting techniques also reduces the quantities of calico needed. Educating students about the benefits of organic calico to farmers and the environment allows them to make their own choices about what they would like to purchase.</li> </ul>

### Performance and results

#### Green Spaces

Rachel recognised an opportunity to increase biodiversity by transforming a dull paved area into a wildlife haven. She worked with a team of colleagues to dig a pond to attract native aquatic species such as frogs and newts and to provide drinking water for birds and bats. Colleagues have been inspired to remove further paving slabs to add raised beds and a bug hotel.

Rachel has led an expansion of the Mare Street garden through building four additional 6m<sup>2</sup> raised beds, increasing biodiversity at the site as well as the educational resource of dye plants which provide a sustainable alternative to chemical dyes. She has worked with local community groups to grow and process flax at the college, to demonstrate to students the time that goes into making linen and encouraging a re-valuing of fabric.

Rachel's work in this area has reflected her belief that it's important to engage students in sustainability through the materials and language of their discipline and to let them directly experience sustainability.

#### Calico

Rachel has examined the fabric allowance (3-10 metres per term depending on course and year) provided to students, which sees them choose between unwanted industry donated fabrics and calico for their toiles. Working with the store technician to encourage the use of donated fabrics, last year students selected to use calico 38% of the time, and donated fabrics 62% of the time. Rachel has also pioneered the use of organic calico by students, agreeing a switch of 14% of our procured calico to organic and making organic calico available to students to buy on the estore. She has ensured the college can sell organic calico to students at the same price per m<sup>2</sup> as non-organic to ensure the price does not make it prohibitively expensive for students.

The Soil Association emphasise the benefit of organic cotton to farmers, the natural environment and users of the fabric who would otherwise be exposed to chemicals. Organic cotton is also GM-free and factory conditions are better.

#### Electricity Reduction

At our Lime Grove site Rachel created a thread graph in reception showing electricity use over the past five years with the current usage figure branching out to suggestions for cutting electricity use. Rachel's aim was to engage staff and students with this data by presenting it in an interesting way, recommending practical ways to reduce electricity usage and invite new suggestions and innovative approaches. Using the graph as

inspiration, Rachel engaged with the facilities team to reduce electricity by encouraging a greater use of natural light and turning off unnecessary lighting, studio equipment and IT cooling systems. Following this intervention, energy figures for LCF's Lime Grove site show a reduction of 78,000 kWh and 39,000 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> between August 2013 - June 2014, when compared to the previous year.

## Section 3 The future

### Lessons learned

Rachel is not a manager, and her job title doesn't include the word sustainability; she is an Embroidery Technician who has enthusiastically engaged multiple staff and student teams in sustainable actions where she has perceived improvements can be made. Rachel has demonstrated that everyone can build sustainable thinking into their roles and that working together multiplies the positive effects for all. This modeling of sustainable behaviour has the ability to be greater in scale, more inclusive and longer lasting than top-down initiatives, as demonstrated by the significant and consistent electricity savings made at Lime Grove.

Our top three findings are:

1. Everyone, regardless of their job role, can bring sustainable thinking into their day-to-day activities.
2. Collaborate across disciplines to have a greater impact and more exciting results.
3. Be visible and positive to engage as many other people as possible.

### Sharing our project

Success stories that Rachel has been involved with have been shared through the LCF blog and Better Lives section of the college intranet, which the 18,000+ UAL students have access to. Please see the further information section for website addresses.

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

"We are delighted that six London College of Fashion projects are Green Gown Award Finalists in 2014. This recognition, of our dedication to sustainability in all that we do and our achievements to date, will help us to celebrate our success and engage even more students, staff and others in using fashion, as a discipline, to drive change, build a sustainable future and improve the way we live."

- Professor Frances Corner OBE, Head of London College of Fashion

### Further information

Contact: Rachel Clowes [r.clowes@fashion.arts.ac.uk](mailto:r.clowes@fashion.arts.ac.uk)

UAL Sustainability Blog: <http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/sustainability/news/>

Better Lives – LCF News: <http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/fashion/tag/better-lives/>