

Sustainability Sharing Series

Embedding Sustainability in Open Days

Open days have come a long way through the years. No longer are they solely focused on selling the institution for its educational performance. Increasing numbers of students are looking at what the institution can offer beyond education, with sustainability being a key concern. 90% of students of students say they want their institution to do more and a growing number of students are choosing institutions based on their sustainability performance.



Issues

- Not sure where to include it or who it should be that talks about it
- Don't feel it is interesting or worth mentioning, does anyone really care?
- Not actually sure what goes on at the institution

Needs

- Can be included in welcome speeches outlining institution strategy, subject specific talks and pointed out during campus tours
- Student sustainability interest is at a record high with many people choosing their institution due to its sustainability commitments
- Educate staff and students about what is being done, include sustainability in all communications and endeavour to make it mainstream

Opportunities

Young people are more engaged with sustainability than ever before and so by expressing your commitment you can help demonstrate how the aims of your institution align with theirs. Young people are increasingly asking “why” with regards to sustainability: “why are you giving out plastic bottles”, “why are you not using renewables”, “why is there no bike space” etc. By showing that you also care about these things you show that you care about the world beyond their academic course and want to make things better. If open days are about trying to attract students then it is the ideal time to talk about this issue that is clearly very important to them and will make a difference in where they choose to study.

What can be done?:

- The University of Birmingham stopped giving out free promotional items altogether at stalls and fairs with no negative feedback.
- Encourage people to take public transport, look at the train or bus times and schedule you start times to fit in
- Have fun interactive games and activities to engage students. For example, a spin the wheel game looking at recycling proved popular as a way to engage students in a fun way
- Involve your student societies or use student ambassadors on open days to draw attention to current sustainability initiatives or have them do a small audit of the open day to see what is missing

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“Young people need to be asked what matters. Not told what matters.”

Communication and Awareness

- Integrate the message of sustainability through the open day. Have it included in the welcome talk from a senior staff member and make sure staff and students know what their institution is doing.
- Don't worry that you aren't perfect! At present sustainability is not prioritised at open days so talking about your aims and ambitions will still set you apart from most.
- Make sure you are consistent. Don't talk about how much you care and then give out plastic promotional items and glossy non-recyclable paper!
- Remember that sustainability is more than the environment. Fairtrade, palm oil, modern day slavery, equality and poverty are all covered by the SDGs so don't solely focus on carbon emissions. You are probably doing a lot already but just aren't highlighting it.

Final Thoughts:

Open days need to be sustainable events and they need to contain the story of sustainability. Where have you come from and where do you want to get to? To have a truly successful and sustainable open day you need both the story and the action. Don't be afraid to involve your students in open days, they may well be more informed and more willing to drive change than you realise.

Interesting Resources and Guides

[Sustainable Events Guide](#): The University of Birmingham has produced an excellent guide on how to run a sustainable event.

[Student Sustainability Research](#): NUS have done a huge amount of research into the views of students and sustainability. This research is useful for building a case for integrating sustainability in open days. A summary can be found [here](#).