

Sustainability Sharing Series

Engaging Students at Green Week and Beyond

Green Week was originally a student led idea that has gradually become more and more ingrained within universities and, in some cases, even the broader community. Green Week is a great way to get students involved but it is important that it is not the only sustainability-focused week as keeping staff and students engaged beyond green week is essential to drive change.



Challenges and needs

There are common challenges across institutions when trying to tackle issue of engaging students:

Issues

- Can be a lack of engagement and student involvement in projects
- Some conflict around whether staff or students should be in charge of Green Week events
- Events can be in isolation and receive little staff or student buy-in
- Can't keep up the level of engagement and finds that interest drops off over time

Needs

- Students to be involved early, supported by the institution and encouraged to lead projects
- Allow students to lead but look for ways the institution can help and share the responsibility
- Good, clear communication to raise awareness of activities and encourage involvement
- Continue hosting sustainability events and work with student societies to encourage interest

Opportunities

Green Week offers a real chance to engage students across all year groups and to expose them to new opportunities and ideas. Often students may have an interest but not know how to get involved and institutions may have projects or issues that require the help of students but struggle to get these projects off the ground. These events can help involve students in the wider community. It also helps foster collaboration between the university and wider community when co-ordinating events together over the whole week.

Examples include:

- Students working with the conference catering teams at Warwick University to help cater events with food made of leftover ingredients
- Forming links with the local community to run events in collaboration, for example with local councils, schools, community groups and faith group
- Teaching new students sustainable skills that they will use across all years and make the whole university more sustainable through time
- Using the week as a platform to launch new services and ideas and a way to highlight to senior leaders just how important sustainability issues are and highlight student engagement
- Selling leftover food to raise money for local charities which helps teach the students about local issues, like food poverty, whilst also helping to solve the issue.
- A large rise in the number of environmental societies as a result of student engagement

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Provide an uncommon experience for students and you'll be rewarded with an uncommon effort and attitude

Communication and Awareness

It can be difficult to raise awareness and communicate with the student body. There is no one 'correct' way to communicate but there are things that can help:

- Making images for posters and social media and sending them to the students, pre-made materials make awareness raising so much easier than asking students to make their own materials
- Encourage peer-to-peer sharing – Students engaging with each other is very effective and encouraging this through students unions and societies is an extremely effective communication channel
- Fresher's week is an ideal time to run events and awareness sessions, many students will not have experienced things like recycling or have pre-existing sustainability knowledge
- Don't forget the staff – Embedding sustainability into classes and lectures is a great way to keep students interested and to promote upcoming events
- Time your events and campaigns to align with the student calendar and avoid busy times
- Get your events into the email and social media networks of students, societies and local groups to ensure they are seen widely

Keeping up Engagement

Making people aware of what is going on is a great first step but it can be hard to translate views into attendees and then attendees into active, regular participants. There are a number of ways to deal with this problem:

- Vary your events – Swap shops, food workshops, sustainability careers workshops and guest speakers can all help keep your students interested and get people attending events
- Run events that could benefit your students – Anything that saves money (e.g. energy or repair sessions) is a great way to involve new people who might gain other interests too
- Run competitions – for example inter-hall energy contests or waste reduction contests can be a great way to engage competitively minded students
- Be open – Tell your students about new sustainability projects and initiatives your institution is running and look for ways to involve them
- Give the students real power – invite them to be on sustainability committees, catering groups and be part of the decision making process
- Don't be afraid to try new things – Not everything will work but most students don't know what they like until they have tried it, so offering new activities and events is vital
- Trying aligning with larger events – for example National Recycling Week, Biodiversity Week, Climate Strikes etc to help keep your events topical and to link with what is happening elsewhere

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