

# ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY

**NUS' ethical and environmental (E&E) team has built its reputation on successes in ethical procurement, behaviour-change projects and research. However, the team's strategy also mandates that its work should provide development opportunities for students.**

*By Charlotte Bonner, Green Impact Development Manager, NUS Group*

**T**he wide portfolio of E&E projects helps unions improve their environmental performance and creates revenue streams for our members, but how does being green help students get jobs?

NUS research undertaken with the Higher Education Academy has shown that students are increasingly recognising that skills in sustainable development are significant for future employability. To meet this demand, we've worked to embed employability opportunities as a core function of projects.

This has been achieved through developing volunteering

opportunities, providing paid internships, developing innovative projects and an agenda that embeds sustainability skills in the curriculum. Our work has aided students throughout the UK, to green themselves, their campuses and their future workplaces.

## **VOLUNTEERING**

It's widely recognised that volunteering presents excellent opportunities for students to develop skills and gain exposure to employers. Our flagship behaviour-change programme, Green Impact, provides volunteering opportunities from single-day to annual placements.

By training students in

environmental management and auditing issues, they are able to help staff and other students to green their unions, universities and colleges from within. NUS supports this process by providing training and resources to inspire and create change, and by acting as mentors.

Some students and student officers have taken this role further, supporting not just Green Impact teams but also their institution's environmental manager. Their involvement gives them excellent project-management and leadership skills, and experience of working with a diverse range of people, making them a competitive prospect for future employers.

## **EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Ultimately it is NUS' goal for all institutions to have sustainability embedded as part of their core business. A large part of this is getting sustainability into every student's curriculum.

Alongside our work on education for sustainable development (ESD) at national level, we've also been building our own work into the curriculum. One example is Anglia Ruskin University, which now offers post-modular credits to auditing Green Impact teams as part of its international business strategy BA.

Through this partnership,



ILLUSTRATION – Alex Foster, BA Illustration at Middlesex University, [alexgetsbetter.blogspot.com](http://alexgetsbetter.blogspot.com)

# THROUGH E&E

students are now delivering a pilot Green Impact model in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). Many of these students go on to include Green Impact as part of their dissertation, not only helping them earn their degree, but also assisting NUS' programmes with their research.

## PAID INTERNSHIPS

Sometimes, our projects need further resources that are best delivered locally rather than by NUS, but need more time than can be feasibly managed by volunteers. For these situations, NUS partners with Change Agents UK.

The charity provides career opportunities for students and recent graduates by employing them as paid interns and placing them within universities and colleges to support NUS environmental programmes. Over the past three years, we have recruited, trained and supported 34 'greener living assistants' (GLAs) throughout the UK.

Feedback suggests that everyone on campus benefits from a local GLA, as they bridge the gap between staff and students, encouraging collaboration while ensuring projects run smoothly. Many GLAs have gone from internships to work for the institutions they were based in – perhaps in the university, the union and even one for the NUS E&E team.

Joanna Romanowicz, a Green Impact Project Officer at NUS, says: "Being a GLA really helped me gain the skills and confidence in communicating

sustainability and engaging a wide variety of audiences, from senior management through to students and academics.

"Working on Green Impact in the estates team at university made me appreciate the challenges and opportunities involved in successfully embedding a behaviour-change programme. It was a natural step to use this knowledge at a national level through working with NUS."

## DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

Not all the E&E opportunities are based in campus buildings. Fresher Freshers, a programme that provides growing spaces on campuses, is run collaboratively between NUS and Homebase.

Crucially, Fresher Freshers gives university communities access to fresh, healthy and local produce. Furthermore, the scheme equips students with a range of transferable skills, which in turn enhances future job prospects.

Developing employability opportunities will always be at the heart of our work. For more information on E&E projects within NUS, on campus and in the local community, visit [nus.org.uk/greener](http://nus.org.uk/greener). For more information on Change Agents UK, visit [changeagents.org.uk](http://changeagents.org.uk).

## GREEN IMPACT IN ACTION

Laura Frary is a recent graduate in international business strategy at Anglia Ruskin. She tells *Spotlight* about her experiences:

"As part of my second year module in international environmental management



## “OUR FLAGSHIP BEHAVIOUR-CHANGE PROGRAMME, GREEN IMPACT, PROVIDES VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES FROM SINGLE-DAY TO ANNUAL PLACEMENTS”

and sustainability, you could choose to take part in the university's Green Impact programme as an auditor. I originally chose to be involved to meet new people, but through the process I learnt a lot and became quite interested in both the environment and auditing.

As I was thinking about my dissertation, I thought about how Green Impact could be applied in small and medium-sized businesses. I pitched the programme to my father's company, and they and a number of other businesses were really keen on utilising the model to

benefit themselves as a company as well as my studies.

"By running Green Impact with the SMEs, I learnt a lot about why and how things can be improved to ensure better care of the environment. I even found myself changing my own habits as well.

"Working with the businesses meant that I had to work in a very professional manner – liaising with their staff, suppliers and stakeholders. This was different to what I was used to working with – students and lecturers – but really helped my communication and leadership skills.

"Since working with NUS, I've been to job interviews where my knowledge on sustainability issues helped me stand out. Recently, when applying for a job at an international logistics firm, I had to present to the interview panel how the company could reduce its environmental impacts – my knowledge from Green Impact formed the basis of this. The company was really impressed with my presentation and I got the job!" ●