

TITLE:

Holistic Sustainability at St Andrews

DATE:

April 2007



INSTITUTION PROFILE

HE

6808 FTE students

1804 staff

Urban

180 buildings

SUMMARY

The University of St Andrews already has a good track record for its sustainability work. It wanted to move to the next level and integrate sustainability into every part of the institution - this included research, teaching and managing its operations. It also wanted to investigate if it could be carbon neutral and used the skills in the university to evaluate this.

EAUC COMMENT

This ambitious integration strategy will help ensure a heightened level of awareness amongst staff, students and the community across the sustainability agenda from energy to social aspects in this University town. By combining sustainable development research, teaching and operational practices across the estate and by championing a carbon neutral status for the institution's energy requirements, the University will help deliver its SD commitments

PROJECT PARTNERS

University of St Andrews, Student Association, The Carbon Trust, Fife Council

THE PROBLEM

The University of St Andrews wanted to build on its progress on sustainable development and be a leader in the field. The next step was for it to integrate sustainability thinking across every aspect of the institution.

To be truly integrated, sustainability needed to be at the heart of all decision-making: teaching practices, research activities and also how the university operates.

In addition, the Estates team wanted to investigate whether the university could go carbon neutral and, in order to do this, first needed to assess what the current carbon impact of the university was.

THE APPROACH

A new body was developed to pull together existing expertise on sustainability and integrate this into all activities. The St Andrews Sustainability Institute was formed and all sustainability work operates broadly under its banner.

The institute will:

- Encourage integration of sustainability into existing courses
- Develop new modules and courses
- Develop a network for academics working in SD
- Facilitate cross-disciplinary approaches to SD

The university also wanted to use the knowledge and expertise of its staff to ensure it was operating sustainably. It joined the Carbon Trust's Higher Education Carbon Management Programme and the Estates team used their existing skills and the tools the programme provided to evaluate the current carbon footprint. Academic's research skills were also called on to help evaluate and minimise the institution's carbon footprint.

GOALS

- Integrate sustainability right across the university in our curriculum, strategies and actions
- Create a centre of excellence to guide and facilitate this ambitious project
- Use readily-available expertise to evaluate and help devise strategies to minimise our carbon footprint
- Provide a mechanism by which expertise in the university can be linked to external bodies including policy bodies as well as public and private sector organisations

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

- How to resource and manage the integration of sustainability across the whole institution - a huge task if done properly!
- Understanding our carbon & ecological footprints before taking action
- Obtaining senior management support and getting them to understand the scale of the task
- Getting support from staff
- Formation of the Sustainability Institute as the body to oversee and guide the work. Devise case studies and use real examples for existing degree courses. Create new courses addressing the diverse range of sustainability issues (especially at the post-graduate level)
- Use the expertise of the estates team and university academics to assess the impact. Join existing programmes or purchase software with tools to make the assessments
- Included integration of this objective into SD policy and strategy and ensured endorsement by senior management. Engaged senior management and explained the leadership opportunities. This enabled resources to be made available for staff engagement and formation of the Sustainability Institute
- Held series of seminars to illustrate the issues, opportunities and benefits. Provided good feedback to all staff to maintain levels of support

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

An academic with expertise in sustainability is currently overseeing the early formation of the St Andrews Sustainability Institute.

A sustainability case study about the work of the university has been created and is delivered on various courses by the Environment and Energy Manager.

An assessment of both the carbon and ecological footprints is underway and the Sustainability Institute will be used to guide the process of addressing the results.

The student body is engaged in sustainability work and a number of groups have been formed to ensure they can input to the process.

To cap it all the institute team received The Times Higher Education Supplement Award for Outstanding Contribution to Sustainable Development. This award recognises those institutions which demonstrate the most imaginative and joined-up approach to the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

LESSONS LEARNT

Commitment from senior management is essential for institutional change. However, a whole new, dedicated body was needed to make this happen. It was too big a task to be absorbed by an existing team - dedicated resources are essential for taking work forward.

Behaviour can be influenced across a whole institution given the right team, management support and enthusiasm.

Understanding your impact is the first step to doing something about it. Using existing expertise is the best – and cheapest – way of carrying out this exercise.

Consult widely in order to engage the people you want to change. They need to own the process too and will be empowered by the consultation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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