

Finalist's case study

University of the West of Scotland

Facilities and Services

UWS Community Gardens

providing living laboratories, social event space and community engagement

Section 1 About the project

Summary

UWS community gardens reduce carbon through food growing; provide a living laboratory for students and a social space for UWS staff, students and surrounding communities. The gardens are developed in partnership with Estates, the Student Association, staff, students and the local community who design, build, plant and maintain the gardens.

Project partners

The project is funded by the Scottish Government Climate Challenge Fund as part of a wider behaviour change programme. The project is managed by the Student Association of the University of the West of Scotland (SAUWS) and the UWS Sustainability Team. Students are fully engaged with delivery from the design through to participating in garden workshops. The UWS Estates team are also actively involved in the project and there is a regular cohort of staff and wider community members who undertake garden sessions. The widespread participation in the project demonstrates that it is an initiative that truly involves a cross section of the University community.

Section 2 The results

The problem

SAUWS was successful in receiving Scottish Government Climate Challenge funding to develop community gardens at Ayr, Hamilton and Paisley campuses. The main challenge in developing the gardens was ensuring they were adopted by the UWS Community in order that they continue to run successfully after the initial grant funding period.

The approach

One of the initial tasks for the Project Co-ordinator was to engage with stakeholders, particularly the UWS Estates team to identify prime locations for the gardens and to create strong working relationships which would help the gardens to flourish and be embedded as a valued part of the University Estate.



Profile

- HEI
- 15,000 students
- 2150 staff
- Urban

Category supported by



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Student engagement is a key priority, the garden designs were based on a student competition and the UWS Zoological society is an active partner in the project, providing additional design specifications to encourage biodiversity and also to enhance the use of the gardens as a living laboratory for teaching and research.

In order to enrich the student experience and enhance employability the gardens provide a range of voluntary and learning opportunities. The gardens have been designed to take into account the teaching needs at each campus; for example as well as providing a classroom for core science subjects the garden at Ayr provides a flexible space with an area for events that is utilised by media students.

UWS participates in the NUS Green Impact scheme and we have tailored the workbook to incorporate sustainable growing activities to increase participation in garden activities. The workshops also provide continuous development opportunities for volunteers with training sessions on tree planting, seed sowing, food growing and weaving living willow structures.

UWS aims to make a difference in the communities we serve, we have developed working partnerships with local groups and the gardens have been designed with accessibility and inclusion as a key part of the project specification.

The garden provides further innovation through the promotion of active travel. Garden sheds are being developed to act as bike 'tools libraries' and workshops are being run to train staff and students in bike maintenance, this addition is helping to grow the gardens into campus environmental hubs.

Our goals

- To embed Community Gardens into the UWS Estate
- To reduce carbon emissions at UWS
- To provide a community resource which will work at bringing staff, students and the local community together
- To create living laboratories to be utilized for a wide range of learning activities

Obstacles and solutions

Obstacle	Solution
Providing a living laboratory for students to undertake relevant study.	Students were consulted from the outset. This included a student design competition and input from UWS Zoological society and PHD students, ensuring that biodiversity featured highly and there was space allocated for research.
Academic staff in non-traditional environmental disciplines implementing education for sustainable development	Provide garden designs that are flexible and tailored to teaching at each campus. E.g. nursing staff and students can engage with the therapeutic principals of the garden.
Encourage staff participation in garden activity	UWS Green Impact workbook was tailored to include gardening activity.
Develop the garden as a community resource	Ensure the design of the garden is accessible and work with local community groups to promote workshop sessions.

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To encourage people to cycle to work

Provide cycle maintenance equipment and workshops at the garden sheds.

Performance and results

Education Outcomes

- SRUC students designed the garden
- Zoological Society students integrated biodiversity features

Carbon Reduction Estimates

Projected carbon savings by the end of March 2015 are 23 tCO₂e.

Community Outcomes

- Over 750 volunteer hours were accumulated in a four month period
- 60 regular garden volunteers
- Provision of approx. 615m² of gardening space
- Health benefits stated by various participants who have disclosed as having Asperger's syndrome, depression, and anxiety, expressing that coming to the garden is a positive experience for them

Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

It was essential to get all stakeholders involved at the project inception and this has worked well to embed the gardens into the UWS Estate.

Students with a specific educational interest in the project have engaged well with the garden; however we have had limited success encouraging students to attend through general promotions. In the next year of the project we plan to have tailored workshops to encourage greater student numbers, this will include veg ledge workshops to inspire students to grow at home during the summer months when many of them are on vacation from UWS.

UWS aspires to be the first dementia friendly university in Scotland. We are currently working with Alzheimer's Scotland to further develop the gardens and create workshops aimed at people with Dementia. We will then work with local groups to plan and deliver the workshops.

Sharing our project

Information has been spread through social media, all-student emails, Green Impact newsletter, the UWS staff e-bulletin, halls and course induction presentations and ongoing information stalls for staff and students as part of larger university/union events.

In order to disseminate information more widely press releases have been sent to newspapers in Paisley and Ayr and the garden has been promoted through a presentation to Ayr Rotary Club.

The garden Co-Coordinator works closely with other garden groups to share information and is in liaison with the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens on the development of a Scottish Student Community Gardens networking day (planned for mid-November).

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

The University of the West of Scotland is proud of our community gardens and the value they provide to our community. As well as receiving recognition for our achievements, being a Green Gown Award finalist will help to promote the Community Gardens as an example of good practice in partnership working in developing the University Estate.

Further information

www.uws.ac.uk/sustainability

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