

University of Worcester Social Responsibility Your Green Future – *New opportunities in a changing world*

Section 1 About the project

Summary

Through interactive events Your Green Future inspires school students with the employment opportunities available to them within the low carbon economy. University students and staff work with industry professionals in supported workshops aimed at making the link between the classroom and career opportunities that work to develop a sustainable future.

Project partners

Rotary, Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Severn Wye Energy Agency. Worcestershire County Council and STEMnet.

Section 2 The results

The problem

Youth unemployment, currently at nearly 17%, is a primary concern for young people and their families as well as for politicians. Concurrently, the move towards a low-carbon and more sustainable economy is gathering momentum. In 2012 the CBI reported that the green economy delivered a third of the nation's growth – £9.2 billion and the UK Government has predicted that over a million people will be employed in the UK's low carbon goods and services sector by 2015. It is therefore vital that current school and university students are well informed about both careers opportunities in this greening economy and the range of employability factors valued by employers (ranging from formal academic achievement and specific practical skills to personal qualities such as punctuality, self-motivation and the ability to work collaboratively with others).

Furthermore, the events embody the best practice outlined in the 2014 Department for Education statutory guidance for schools about delivering 'careers guidance and inspiration' in which it states 'Choices made at school should be based on a clear view of the current labour market and how opportunities may change in the future' and it cites evidence from the Education and Employers Task force that 'that access to a network of employers is associated with better outcomes for young people'.

The approach

At Your Green Future (YGF) school students participated in life-like practical and creative workshops, led by businesses and supported by University of Worcester staff and university student sustainability mentors. This included spending time in the exhibition hall, interviewing the companies about the services and products



Profile

- A Higher Education Institution
- 10,000 students
- 1,000 staff
- Urban campus

Finalist's case study

which they were representing and learning about the entry levels and careers opportunities afforded by them. Through these activities YGF has secured a unique role in bridging the gap between the growing employment opportunities in the low carbon economy and the escalating number of young people who are unemployed, or preparing for entering the jobs market.

Our goals

Your Green Future (YGF) events stem from the recognition that environmental technologies and the low carbon economy are key growth sectors for the UK. We need to actively engage young people, the future working population, in developing the skills that are required to make the transition. YGF therefore aligns learning and careers advice with the future skills needs of business.

Obstacles and solutions

Meeting social responsibility	Whilst the target audience was young people, the event feedback revealed that all attendees (university staff and students, secondary schools and colleges, businesses, and community groups, e.g. Rotary) benefited and that the event promoted a stronger, more sustainable community. For instance, business attendees stated "I hadn't realised how much I would learn and be able to take back to my own life and business".
Widening Participation and outreach	Although the event was advertised widely and open to all local school with students in the target age range, the organisers particularly encouraged those schools in the area with recognised levels of disadvantage, as a result such schools were very well represented at the event. Having established stronger links with staff from these schools through their attendance at the event, staff from the University Widening Participation and Outreach are now in the position to follow up with bespoke support in the future.
CPD for teaching staff	Teachers were also provided with information about bringing sustainability into the classroom - 100% of teachers stated they themselves had learnt from the event and feedback comments included 'a great opportunity to meet other practitioners and companies.
Providing learning opportunities that are mutually beneficial	<p>The events increased school and university students' interest in the low carbon economy, as well as their aspirations surrounding employment in their future (71% left the event being interested in getting a job that helps towards improved sustainability, compared with 30% on arrival).</p> <p>"I hadn't realised how much I would learn and be able to take back to my own life and business." Ecotricity</p> <p>"The questions that the students came up with offered a different view point to my own, from which to consider our proposed product." Jaguar Land Rover</p>

Finalist's case study

Performance and results

YGF events (June 2013, June 2014) bringing together over:

- 750 Herefordshire and Worcestershire young people from 35 schools and colleges
- 60 businesses
- 30 university Sustainability Mentors*
- 10 university and Student Union staff from 5 departments

University Sustainability Mentors and staff facilitated engagement between young people and a wide range of professionals in interactive workshops, which included developing business plans for sustainable food and fashion products; creating energy plans for communities; 'investing' in cutting edge 'green' innovations; negotiating a local Climate Action Plan; and learning about jobs and skills from exhibitors.

In turn Sustainability Mentors gained transferable employability and entrepreneurship skills, including an increased understanding of;

- what sustainability means for business
- how putting sustainability at the core of business can enable it to thrive long-term by driving down costs, opening up new markets through innovation, and enhancing reputations.
- the increasing importance of flexibility and working in partnership in future careers.
- the need for innovation in addressing some of the biggest challenges we face (climate change, the search for sustainable energy, deteriorating infrastructure).
- the need to implement a range of solutions as no single solution can work to solve all the issues involved.

* Sustainability student volunteering opportunities are many and varied but often focus on university based projects. Sustainability Mentors programme provides a progression framework for volunteers and broadens the sustainability community programme to provide skilled and trained students to support outreach in schools and the community.

Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

This project exemplifies economic, social and environmental sustainability in the wider community, a strategic commitment of the University. Management and leadership skills are needed in the social, civic and public sectors to change attitudes and behaviours to how we consume products and to drive demand for green products and services. The University's experience is that sustainability is transformational for students, helping students to develop intellectual breadth and criticality in their thinking. The competences developed are highly valued by employers.

Sharing our project

Press releases were issued after the event and the Local Delivery Team (University, Rotary, Local Authorities, Severn Wye Energy Agency, Local STEMNET team) have disseminated information about the event.

A high quality brochure including event feedback and photos has been produced and is available in print and online: <http://www.youngreenfuture.org.uk/events/worcester-2014>

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

This award provides independent recognition of our collaborative approach bringing together local business experts and students to provide hands-on experience. It is particularly pleasing to have done so well in the Green Gown 10th anniversary year and at a point when the awards have gained greater international recognition. These awards are very significant in raising the profile of an approach that integrates experiential learning, bringing together young people, education providers, university students and businesses.

Further information

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<http://www.worc.ac.uk/discover/sustainability.html>