

Colleges

WINNER

Learning for Life is the Legacy of Pershore Group of Colleges

On 1 August 2007 the Pershore Group of Colleges ended its life, with its Pershore campus merging with Warwickshire College, and the Holme Lacy farm campus joining the Herefordshire College of Technology. But one legacy remains, in the form of staff, students and stakeholders influenced by its successful integration of sustainable development into all of its activities. The journey began in 2000-1, with a sustainability audit of the Holme Lacy campus, and the training of 16 staff as sustainability champions. In 2002 sustainable development became part of Pershore's mission statement and a series of task groups set challenging goals. These included:

- A 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020
- Targets for the percentage of refectory food which is unprocessed (36% at Holme Lacy in 2006-7), local (35% from under 30 miles), campus grown (3%) and organic (2%)
- Targets for the percentage of purchases from local suppliers (64% achieved by 2006)
- Elimination of all green waste by composting (achieved by 2006).

Other initiatives included:

- Integrating sustainable development into all courses and tutorials for full-time students
- Innovative student projects on sustainability topics, including one on helping people with disabilities grow and sell organic vegetables (which was runner up in a national scheme)
- Increasing organic farming - to 650 of the College's 750 acres by 2006
- Mapping the College's ecological footprint
- Winning LSC funding for a sustainable development project to train internal champions and share best practice within all post-sixteen education and training institutions in Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Highlighting food sustainability issues within local communities by selling College organic produce, working with schools and encouraging student volunteers
- Adapting college vehicles to use 20% biodiesel rather than the standard 5%.

Two non-environmental benefits from these initiatives were encouragement of more students to land based training at the College, and plaudits for sustainability activities in external inspections.

Former Pershore College Principal Heather Barrett-Mold says that "our aim was to embed sustainability practices into the day to day experience of students and staff, and to encourage them to actively consider sustainability issues in their future lives, work and relationships. I hope, and believe, that the results will live on, through staff influencing the activities of our successor organisations, and the personal development of our alumni."



Organic agriculture in Herefordshire

Judges' Comments on Colleges

Sustainability in colleges requires change across the entire establishment, and this has been the case with the Pershore Group of Colleges. The extent, width and depth of their community and environmental initiatives is most impressive, and has been maintained over time. They also demonstrate how much difference land based colleges can make to national and local life, by demonstrating alternative approaches to agriculture and food, and inspiring others to follow. However, the central message of their work is relevant to all institutions - an ongoing, progressive, commitment to sustainable development can create additional benefits such as enhanced recruitment and reputation.