

Continuous Improvement

WINNER

Environmental Success at the University of Leeds

Since 2002 the University has more than doubled its recycling, become a Fairtrade university, reduced carbon emissions and increased the numbers of staff and students walking, cycling and using public transport for commuting. These successes build on previous environmental initiatives, including an 18MW combined heat and power plant.



Keith Pitcher and Steffi Hasse

Two key implementation steps were the creation of an Environmental Management Steering Group - chaired by Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Fisher - in 2003, and establishment of an Environmental Management System in 2004. The latter is based on five key areas - Carbon Management (energy efficiency, sustainable buildings and renewable energy), Fair Trade, Sustainable Purchasing, Transport and Waste Management. Each area has a management group of staff and students, with targets and budgets. In 2006, Carbon Management had a budget of £180,000 (financed from a ring-fenced fund for energy savings and reductions), and Transport £118,000 (financed by car parking charges).

Staff capacity has been expanded by two new full time environmental posts (Environmental Manager, Dr. Keith Pitcher, and Transport Co-ordinator, Steffi Hasse). Specified time allowances are also given in the job descriptions of 40 staff environmental co-ordinators. Other university employees contribute time to the programmes, including 12 cleaning staff (one of them the cleaning manager, and another a supervisor).

This capacity has enabled the establishment of 'Green Teams' in areas of the campus, including Residential Commercial Services who appointed 12 student environmental reps in halls of residences and flats. They are supported by intensive communication to staff, students and stakeholders. The means include a dedicated web site, meetings with faculty and departmental heads, creation of a slot in all staff induction courses, seminars for staff and students on all new activities, and regular articles in the university's staff magazine.

Academic Estates links have also been strengthened. Keith Pitcher sits on the management group for the University's Interdisciplinary Institute for Earth, Energy and Environment. In 2005 a school of environment teaching module was redesigned around environmental audits of university facilities. One output has been the production of a Green Guide by students, which is distributed to all residents in university accommodation.

Keith Pitcher believes that "adopting a policy led environmental management system has provided resources and buy-in at all levels of the organisation for staff and students. A strategic view also highlights the long-term financial benefits of environmental improvement. For example, our investment of £92,000 in recycling facilities has a pay back of three years on current disposal costs, and will protect us against future increases. It also sends a signal that we're a university in tune with future trends, which helps with recruitment and research funding."

Judges' Comments on Continuous Improvement

There are many barriers to environmental improvement, some generic to all sectors, and others more specific to further and higher education. Overcoming these barriers requires a long-term commitment by senior managers, and effective, target-driven, implementation of policies and initiatives. All these were evidenced in the short-listed applications for this category, which made it exceptionally difficult to judge. We have therefore selected a mix of applications. Some demonstrate success in the exceptionally difficult task of achieving continuous improvement across the whole institution, while others focus on one topic area. And, whilst a steady long term commitment to improvement is always admirable and effective, several of the applications show that a committed approach can yield impressive results even within a few years.

- The Leeds Environmental Policy - "support continuous environmental improvement by establishing demanding but achievable and measurable environmental performance targets that are reviewed and externally reported annually"

Strategic Environmental Management - Performance Measurement and Targeting

The development of an environmental strategy, setting of quantitative targets, and the on-going measurement of performance in order to track progress, benchmark, and identify priorities are crucial parts of continuous improvement. The University of Leeds' provides a useful reference case for other institutions wishing to drive continuous improvement.

In 2003 the university established an environmental management structure that identified five strategic areas, with new financial resources and quantitative targets set for each. These were:

- Carbon Management - a 10% reduction in both energy-related CO₂ emissions, and in absolute energy consumption, per student FTE from their 2005/6 level by 2010. A reduction of 2% electricity consumption was achieved in the first 7 months of 2006/7 compared to a trend of 3% per annum increase. The University uses HEFCE's Estates Management Statistics to benchmark its energy consumption against other research-intensive universities (defined as members of the Russell Group), and is well below the mean for both per student FTE and per m² gross internal area.
- Fair Trade - a target of achieving University-wide Fairtrade accreditation (achieved in 2005).
- Sustainable Buildings - 2006 Estate Strategy requires BREEAM Very Good/Excellent ratings to be achieved for all new buildings and refurbishments.
- Sustainable Purchasing - a Buy Recycled project with Recycling Action Yorkshire is developing targets and programmes for recycled content in building construction materials and office supplies.
- Transport - a target of a 5% reduction in people traveling to the campus by car every three years, commencing 2003. In fact, surveys show that the number of staff driving a car to work dropped from 46% in 2004 to 28% in 2007, and students from 8% to 6% over the same period.
- Waste Management - targets of 25% and 33% recycling by 2005 and 2015 respectively. Overall recycling rates increased from c.16% in 2002 to 34.6% in 2006 (and are 50% - 75% in many office buildings).



Environmental progress is measured against other organisations - including universities - by participating in Business in the Community's Environment Index assessment. The university was ranked first in 2006 out of the 6 universities who participated, with a score of 91% (compared to 68% and 5th place in 2003). In the same year it came 22nd out of all 117 organisations participating in the Yorkshire region (again a significant improvement from the 63rd out of 120 ranking of 2002).

Recycling in the Vice Chancellor's office, with (left to right) Dr Keith Pitcher, Environmental Officer; Professor Michael Arthur, Vice Chancellor; Professor John Fisher, Deputy Vice Chancellor, and Chair of the Environmental Steering Group; Janet Willis, Cleaning Services Manager.

Judges' Comments on Continuous Improvement (continued)

The University of Leeds emerged as the overall winner because of its 'textbook' development and implementation of an articulate, strategic, and comprehensive approach to continuous environmental improvement, intended to move it to a higher level of performance. In the five years of its operation, this has resulted in impressive - and well evidenced - progress in many areas. The programme's noteworthy features include sustained high level interest and support; setting - and achieving - quantitative improvement targets; building capacity not only through an environmental champions network but also amongst sometimes neglected groups such as cleaning staff; working effectively with external partners; and making a considerable time commitment to sharing its experience with other universities and colleges, both regionally and nationally.