

Student Initiatives

WINNER

Extending Life Cycles at the University of York Students' Union

The University of York has many keen cyclists, but some students leave without their bikes. In the past, security staff sent unwanted machines for scrap, or to landfill. Now they are handed to the Union, who get as many as possible in working order and auction them early in the autumn term. In 2006 the auction raised £1650 from the sale of 80 bikes.

Half the proceeds have gone to Target Tuberculosis, which has used them to buy 25 bicycles for African doctors. Now they can visit more villages, and treat more people. The remainder funds the work of the Union's elected Environmental and Ethical Campaigners (Charlotte Bonner and Clare Hawley in 2005-6). In addition to organising the bike auction itself, this includes establishing recycling facilities in all campus residences, setting up awareness raising events, and helping achieve the University's Fairtrade accreditation.

The bike auction is accompanied by a 'Bike Doctor's clinic' provided by a local bike shop. With funding from the University's Sustainable Transport Fund, this offers free minor 'on the spot' adjustments or repairs to purchasers, or other students and staff. The shop also offers discounted rates for any major repairs. The police attend to provide free microchip security tagging (paid for by the University's Security Department). The first year's auction had a representative from the City of York Council offering safety information and discounted cycle training, and this was reinstated for 2007.



Bikes awaiting auction

Charlotte Bonner believes that "the scheme challenges the disposable nature of modern society, and positively promotes cycling. Many students here drive cars, or use taxis. One reason is the initial cost of purchasing a decent bike, which the auction has reduced for many people. The free electronic tagging also reduces the risk of bicycles being stolen, which is a big problem in York."

Clare Hawley adds that "the simplicity of our scheme makes it incredibly easy to replicate. The only resources required are a reasonably sized outdoor space, some parcel tags, a loudspeaker and the facilities to fill out the paperwork required on the day."

Judge's Comments on Student Initiatives

The right student initiatives can unleash enormous amounts of creativity and enthusiasm whilst requiring little or no resource. This has been the case with the innovative bicycle recycling scheme developed by University of York Students' Union. This has been cleverly shaped to address a range of sustainability agendas, from cash-strapped students on campus to poor people in Africa, and has achieved great success from modest funding by the University. It encapsulates everything student initiatives can achieve, and should be highly replicable across other universities and colleges.