

# Finalist's case study

## Worcester Students' Union Category Technical Innovation **ENERGIZE WORCESTER - Students drive energy efficiency in their homes and beyond**

### Section 1 About the project

#### Summary

Tackling poor energy efficiency in student housing; students are offered a range of interventions and incentives to develop appropriate energy habits. Trained and accredited peers give energy advice through house visits and tailored home energy reports. A bespoke 'app' incentivises; landlords are encouraged to make infrastructure improvements and install Smart meters.

#### Project partners

Student Green Fund, University of Worcester, Birmingham Guild of Students, University of Birmingham, Worcester City Council, Worcestershire County Council, Change Agents UK, Encraft, Transition Worcester Energy Group, Arboretum Residents Association, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester Massachusetts USA, Smart Meters UK Free issue and install Smart meters: British Gas, Eon

### Section 2 The results

#### The problem

UK properties are amongst the least thermally efficient in Western Europe, 28% of UK's total CO2 emissions each year. NUS survey has shown:

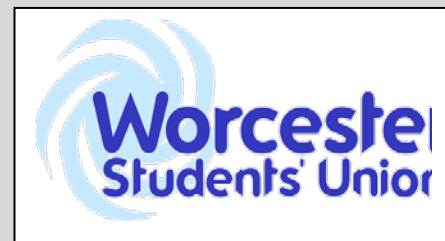
- 61% students experience damp in rented houses
- 52% think their homes are uncomfortably cold
- 48% believe their home is poorly insulated and draughty

Students are widely recognised as being in fuel poverty exacerbated by a lack of life experience and poor understanding of energy. Many students do not fully understand their rights in relation to their tenancy and property quality.

#### The approach

Energize Worcester aims to:

~ Create a network of skilled students with enhanced employment opportunities, pro-environmental behaviours and energy-saving habits. The habit discontinuity hypothesis suggests individuals are more likely to adopt new habits if they are going through a lifestyle change as students do when they move out of halls into independent living



#### Profile

- Students' Union
- 10,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 12 staff
- Urban

Category supported by



Working together

# Finalist's case study

- ~ Bespoke student facing software platform (app) regular incentives, easy to understand reports, instant feedback
- ~ Save quantifiable amounts of energy and money and evaluate the cost effectiveness of different methods of interventions
- ~ Work with landlords to make infrastructure improvements, including fitting free issue Smartmeters
- ~ Second location – Birmingham – test replicability
- ~ Aligned workstream working on non-student shared houses, commenced May 2014, in small area of the city, using Worcester Massachusetts USA students

The project commenced in October 2013 and runs for two years

## Our goals

In the UK, there are approximately 2.5 million students in university in any given academic year. Over 42 % live in privately rented accommodation, the majority live in shared houses classified as Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO). Students are often sufferers of the fuel debt as a result of two key factors: lack of life experience, and a poor understanding of energy distribution and usage. To change the situation, an innovative education method is needed.

Energize Worcester is a two year project funded through HEFCE's Student Green Fund. The project has developed a bespoke online application (a.k.a. the Energize app) to help student tenants to visualise their energy consumption by simply inputting their meter reading once a month. To work with landlords to encourage retrofit measures to make their properties more thermally efficient.

## Obstacles and solutions

User feedback from year one	The App was made more user friendly following feedback from administrators and student users.
Launch events coincided with flooding and University closure	Additional resources in promotional events and prizes as incentives, spread out throughout the year. Revised communications strategy.
Students after registering not adding monthly meter readings	Increased efforts at installing SMART meters, and more resources in visiting properties to encourage meter reading uploads.
Low energy literacy rate	Lacking in energy knowledge makes it hard for students to fully understand energy and this produces a perceived loss of control
Email fatigue	Students receive innumerable emails from the University, SU and affiliated clubs and societies. If they are deemed irrelevant they are ignored. See revised communications strategy.
Energy Issues are not a priority	Students are less likely to commit to something if it does not have an immediate impact on their lives.

# Finalist's case study

## Performance and results

Interim findings after first 5 months.

Key project parameters	Year 1 Target	Result to date
No. of students trained as EAs	5	5
No. of households supported by EAs	50	48
No. of households participating in the project	150	48
No. of students living in participating households (ave 4.5/property)	675	216
Unique page views on the website	60,000	3,500
Social media followers		1,000

## Section 3 The future

### Lessons learned

Through the simple exercise of reading a meter students could develop more comprehensive understanding of their energy consumption and energy profiles of their houses in relation with their personal energy performance. Energize Worcester provides a dynamic supporting system to facilitate students with their energy habits. A front facing website stores the information on energy saving and provides tips, competitions and prizes, and information for landlords. Social media platforms also provide support and further 'casual' communication to students instantly.

Energize Worcester has hired and trained 10 students through City & Guilds energy advice accreditation as Energy Advocates. Energy Advocates provide personal support to student tenants with their energy issues throughout the year. From September 2014, the Energize project launched in University of Birmingham in partnership with University of Birmingham Guild of Students, branded as Energize Birmingham. It is running parallel with the Energize Worcester project to test and compare the project impacts in different university towns. Collectively, over 300 students from over 150 properties are involved in the project as participants so far, the aim is to develop an effective method to encourage changes from students to adopt appropriate energy habits for life.

### Sharing our project

Presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Symposium In Sustainable Development in September 2014. Chapter in forthcoming publication from the same event.

# Finalist's case study

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

The Student's Union has both independently and with the University of Worcester worked on many sustainability initiatives. Getting external recognition for this project, by being shortlisted in these prestigious awards is really gratifying.

### Further information

Worcester Students' Union

Peng Li

Project Manager

01905 543223/07976478057

p.li@worc.ac.uk

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/energizeworc>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EnergizeWorcester>