

TITLE:

Cross-curriculum sustainability at Bedford College



DATE:

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SUMMARY

Bedford College is a leader in sustainability and renewable energy training within the UK. It is a Centre of Vocational Excellence in Skills for Energy and was this year's winner of the Green Gown Award for courses.

Sustainability features on lots of courses from art to motor vehicle maintenance. Dedicated Environmental Awareness and Developing Sustainable Development courses are also offered on full time courses in the Technology and Construction departments.

INSTITUTION PROFILE

Large further education college
496 employees
Charity
8 sites

EAUC COMMENT

Bedford College provides an important example of how an institution can embed sustainability into its curriculum by actively seeking support and guidance from both the education sector and industry. As a result, they have received the sector recognition they deserve.

THE PROBLEM

Bedford College recognised that sustainability needed to be incorporated across all subjects in order to equip students with the knowledge and skills to contribute to a more sustainable society. While dedicated sustainability courses are available, the college was keen to integrate sustainability into the entire curriculum.

The college believes education and training providers can play a key role in closing the current skills gap – particularly in the area of the built environment where the impact could be huge – but in order to do this they needed to develop their own knowledge, skills and resources.

THE APPROACH

Initially the project focused on the courses delivered by the college's Centre for Technology and was led by the Centre Director. It also had buy-in from the college's Executive Team, so time and resources could be dedicated to it.

A three-year plan adopted by Centre for Technology in 2004 set a target for the centre to become a leader in this area, and gain Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status in renewable energy technologies. With a focused effort on curriculum developments, community and industry engagement and active participation in national initiatives, this was achieved within 18 months. (This was half way through the Centre for Technology's 3-year plan).

Examples of sustainability on the college's courses include:

- Motor Vehicle students learning about alternative fuel technologies
- Arts students designing eco-bags, awareness raising posters and screen savers to communicate sustainability messages to fellow students and staff across the college
- Plumbing students learning about solar heating

Director of Centre for Technology who was instrumental in these developments has recently been appointed to a cross college role as Director of Sustainability to lead the whole college focus on sustainability.

OUR GOALS

- Develop workforce skills to help stimulate the growth of the renewable energy industry
- Working with the Sector Skills Councils, develop and deliver training that meets the needs of industry
- Help build the Further Education sector's capacity to develop an environmentally-aware and skilled workforce
- Take an active role in regional and national networks, and support policy developments relating to sustainability
- Support local community initiatives

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

Obstacles

- Lack of staff skills and knowledge
- Lack of funding for equipment
- Lack of staff enthusiasm

Solutions

- Identify related industry activity and training, and enable staff to participate as part of their Continuing Professional Development programme
- Senior staff support enabled resources to be made available for new developments, from the curriculum area funds
- CoVE funding helped support future developments. Although there is no longer funding from the LSC through this initiative, other funding may be available, for example through EU projects or from regional development agencies.
- Industry support received (donation of equipment) from a number of different sources. This was achieved through discussions with the suppliers of renewable energy equipment. Suppliers are keen to have people trained on installing and maintaining their equipment as this is a good way of introducing their goods to installers.
- Engage all curriculum area staff in the annual planning process, e.g.
 - o Incorporate sustainability related topics and college-wide / local environmental initiatives into schemes of work
 - o Add Sustainability / Environmental Awareness courses into curriculum plans as additional qualifications
- Identify staff who are interested in energy and sustainability and get them to lead related developments

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

Bedford College was awarded Centre of Vocational Excellence Status in January 2006. Bedford has a whole-college approach to sustainability. This includes the development and implementation of a Sustainability Policy and cross-college workgroups focusing on estates, curriculum and community initiatives.

Since 2005 the college has trained hundreds of plumbers and electricians in installing photovoltaic and solar thermal systems. Hundreds more have studied sustainable development and environmental awareness courses and worked on projects relating to energy and sustainability.

The college won the 2007-2008 HEEPI Green Gown Award in recognition for its contribution to sustainability training.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Senior support and commitment is crucial to embedding sustainability across an institution. Engaging with national networks and getting involved in community projects is also important
- Leading can be frustrating – first-year enrolments on some of the new courses were very low, but have since picked up as the issues have risen up the industry's agenda
- When developing new subjects you need to work with awarding bodies and industry to help shape their requirements
- It will all be worth it in the end - Bedford College now plays a leading role in sustainability-related FE sector developments and is recognised by industry as a leader in the field of sustainability training

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Links:

Bedford College Centre for Technology -

www.bedford.ac.uk/ourcentres/centrefortech

Centres of Vocation Excellence www.cove.lsc.gov.uk/

Green Gown Awards www.eauc.org.uk



The Environmental and Sustainability Champion within Further and Higher Education in the United Kingdom.

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