

TITLE:

Sustainability Suits Southwark College

DATE:

July 2008



INSTITUTION PROFILE

FE
8900 FTE students
500 staff
Urban
3 sites

SUMMARY

Integrating sustainability across the curriculum came with the extra benefit of saving money on energy bills for Southwark College.

A Sustainable Development Steering Group was formed to guide the process and to ensure the changes were embedded across the college.

Now the whole college community benefits from a wide range of sustainability initiatives including day trips and gardens built and maintained by the students.

EAUC COMMENT

This is an excellent example of a college integrating sustainability into the curriculum and engaging its students to make them more environmentally aware.

THE PROBLEM

After attending training on Sustainable Development sponsored by the Learning and Skills Council, three of members of staff at Southwark College were inspired to do more on the subject. The college decided it would increase its students' awareness of sustainable development by integrating it into the curriculum, as well as offering stand-alone courses in the subject.

The college also recognised that it could benefit from this raised awareness by reducing its environmental impact - having reduced energy bills and increased recycling. The college realised that for any change to be substantial and long-term it needed to focus on its students and their whole lifestyle both in college and out, as they are responsible for the majority of its impact.

THE APPROACH

The college chose to tackle sustainability from both the top – the Governors and senior management whose support was essential to make a lasting change – and bottom – the students, who form the majority of the college population. The staff in the 'middle' were largely converted already. To drive the initiative forward a Sustainable Development Steering Group was formed and endorsed by senior management. The Governors were then approached and presented with a paper proposing the integration of sustainability into the college and curriculum.

All departments were challenged to integrate sustainability into the taught curriculum and to look for opportunities for visits which would enhance this learning. To support the integration of sustainability into the traditional curriculum, the college now offers part-time evening courses in Energy Awareness and Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development criteria have been included in the quality improvement process. All managers are required to respond in their annual self-assessment report and their development plan for improvement.

Progress is reviewed monthly by the Sustainable Development Steering Group, which monitors progress against an overall college action plan.

To cement its commitment, changes were also made to the traditional ways of delivering lessons. Teaching and learning using more digital media applications is now strongly encouraged, which not only makes lessons more interesting but also reduces photocopying. Most classrooms and laboratories have interactive whiteboards and the college Virtual Learning Environment is used for learning resources, conferences and assessments.

OUR GOALS

- To engage staff and learners in Sustainable Development
- To raise the profile of Sustainable Development throughout the college, especially reduce, reuse, recycle
- To make learners aware of their responsibility to make Southwark College as green as possible
- To run awareness raising workshops and educational visits for students
- To measure the impact of our campaign and report back to students as a motivator.

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

Obstacles

- Implementing a consistent approach right across the college
- Students not aware of green issues
- Not enough student involvement on the steering committee
- Developing suitable performance criteria with which to monitor progress year-on-year

Solutions

- Formation of the Sustainable Development Steering Group, which oversees and assesses all activity
- Sustainability integrated across all subject areas
Themed visits arranged
Workshops for students delivered by the World Development Movement - a lobby group dedicated to eradicating poverty
- The Students Union has created a Sustainable Development Officer post to encourage students to get active
- The Carbon Trust has carried out an annual assessment, which has provided the baseline with which to measure progress. It made a series of recommendations and which have been implemented
Energy and water consumption is measured by units rather than £s

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

- 120 students have attended sustainable development-themed educational visits e.g. to the Thames Barrier and to South East London Combined Heat and Power Station, Bermondsey
- 250 college students have attended half-day sustainable development workshops
- New sustainability courses for local businesses are offered through the School of Engineering as part of LSC-funded provision
- Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities students compost waste from the Catering Department and use it on the garden they have built at Bermondsey
- 120 students have completed sustainable development assignments across four departments and increased targets are set year on year
- The Carbon Trust carried out an assessment of the College's energy efficiency and sustainability, and identified that the measures taken by the College to date have been very effective in improving its energy efficiency

LESSONS LEARNT

- Attitudes towards sustainability do not change overnight. A consistent approach is needed to effect change across a whole institution
- Constant involvement and awareness-raising is the key to embedding the importance of green issues in people's lives
- Encouraging learners to understand their roles and responsibilities in their communities and how their actions affect their community locally and globally
- Visits allow students to see the practical application of sustainability and stimulate discussion in classroom sessions
- It seems that most staff and students wish to contribute to sustainability, but need to know how they can do so and what the impact would be

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Links:
Southwark College www.southwark.ac.uk
Carbon Trust www.carbontrust.co.uk
World Development Movement www.wdm.org.uk



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

The EAUC provides training, advice and support to our members as well as providing a forum for best practice in the sector.

To join phone 01242 714321

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