

What is Ecoversity?

Briefing Note No. 1a

eco**o**versity
making sustainability work



WHAT IS ECOVERSITY ? (2007 - 2009)

These briefing papers describe sustainability actions at the University of Bradford as part of the development of our Ecoversity programme.

These papers are developed through The Sustainable Education Directorate together with University staff and students featured inside, and are part of our commitment to improving communication around Ecoversity.

Comments and feedback are welcome and should be sent to: ecoversity@bradford.ac.uk

“ It is a corporate objective to become a beacon in the HE sector and beyond for practicing sustainable development ”

Professor Geoff Layer Pro Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching and Ecoversity Programme Sponsor.

What is Ecoversity?

Ecoversity is the name given to the University's programme of embedding the principles of sustainable development across the Institution.

How did Ecoversity start?

Ecoversity emerged during 2005 as a response to a number of factors.

Firstly, the University campus was in urgent need of refurbishment. Secondly, data on student admissions showed that the state of the campus featured as an important factor in some students rejecting the offer of a place. Thirdly, student surveys indicated dissatisfaction with the general lack of amenities in Halls of Residence as well as the poor quality of existing ones; the lack of social and study space and students' wish for more 'life' on campus.

Externally the University was strongly influenced by the HEFCE consultation on sustainable development 'Sustainable Development in Higher Education: consultation on a support strategy and action plan' (HEFCE 2005) which led to the questions 'What might sustainable development mean for a University like Bradford?' and 'How might sustainability provide a means of linking a number of issues and challenges facing the University in way that would foster new, positive and creative action?' Putting these questions on the agenda was made easier by the fact that sustainable development was already embedded as one of 6 core values in its Corporate Strategy 2005-9 which sets out the University's strategic aims, corporate values and objectives.

Against this backdrop 'Ecoversity' emerged as something that combined our core values and some of the key challenges facing the Institution as well as being a framework for student and educationally focused sustainable campus regeneration.

Was there an educational and academic rationale for Ecoversity?

Bradford is a mid sized (11,000 students, £100M turnover)

University comprising three campuses in different parts of the City of Bradford. The University comprises seven main academic Schools in Management, Health, Life Sciences, Social and International Studies, Engineering, Design and Technology, Life Long Education and Development and Informatics. Around 70% of our students are registered on programmes that are professionally accredited. The University has a leading national reputation for widening participation and graduate employment.

The University has a distinctive student profile. Over half of our home first year and foundation students are from minority ethnic groups, and nearly half come from low income groups. Nearly 45% of our students live in the parental home. 22% of our students are from outside of the UK, drawn from more than 100 countries, mostly in the global south.

The HEFCE vision statement on sustainable development states that the greatest contribution the HE sector can make to sustainable development is via the education of its students. As with many Universities, we had a some pockets of teaching and research expertise re. sustainable development, although this was fragmented. It was evident that many academic areas of the University had teaching programmes, research and knowledge transfer activities that could be aligned to notions of sustainable development. The HEFCE statement therefore provided a powerful driver for the formulation of academic and educational aspects of Ecoversity. We used the term 'education for sustainable development' as the basis for defining the educational and academic objectives for Ecoversity.

Ecoversity 2005

Ecoversity was launched in November 2005. Not surprisingly at the time of the launch, Ecoversity was most strongly identified with Estates projects: the University had undertaken a number of new buildings and environmental management activities that were committed to sustainable development accountability frameworks, it had developed an environmental management system and participated in the Carbon Trust's Higher Education Carbon Management Club. This Estates-based focus was reinforced by a new Campus Masterplan that set out to address some of the issues that students themselves had raised: the need to bring more student activity and green spaces to the heart of the campus. Exploring ways of promote the health and well-being of staff and students and create stronger linkages with our surrounding communities was also a priority. A central feature of the master plan was the proposal for a 500 bed space sustainable student village at the heart of the city centre.

Backed by the Vice-Chancellor and Senior Management

Group, Ecoversity was set up as a University programme with a dedicated 'sponsor' and a programme manager. A programme board was established to oversee the development of Ecoversity under four project objectives Environment, Community, Education for Sustainable Development and Economy – each with its own champion. more detailed work plan for the different areas.

Ecoversity 2006-07

The early period of 2006 saw several new Estates projects started or completed, most notably the new atrium project which houses the Student Hub - a one stop shop for student administration and significantly enhanced social and informal learning spaces for students. As these new structures and spaces emerged, the wider University began to see and experience visible change space.

In early 2007 the University was awarded a £3.1M Strategic Development Fund grant by HEFCE for a project known as Ecoversity StuDent – a title given to emphasize the significant student focus of Ecoversity. This project was underpinned by 3 major commitments

- Ecoversity is about promoting sustainable living and learning
- Ecoversity has a big focus on the student experience
- Ecoversity is a Institutional-wide approach which seeks to promote positive sustainable behavioral change amongst our students, staff and other stakeholders

In June 2007 a new Vice-Chancellor took up office and immediately stated his commitment to Ecoversity. At the same time, the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching was asked to take on the role of programme sponsor for Ecoversity reflecting the increasing emphasis on the educational and student experience aspects of Ecoversity.

What has been learnt from the first phase of Ecoversity

The first phase of Ecoversity up to 2007 has produced a number of positive achievements and steps forward including delivery of several significant campus regeneration projects. Conversations across campus however were revealing that as Ecoversity began to develop that a number of perceptions and issues were forming.

A widespread perception has been that there was little engagement with staff or students in the development and decision-making around Ecoversity and a feeling

that it was largely a top-down Estates-driven programme, involving a number of small 'bitty' projects. Whilst there was widespread interest and enthusiasm for the vision it was also evident that there were multiple issues that people wanted Ecoversity to address and in some cases a sense that 'it's too big', 'it's too hard', 'too complicated' or 'it won't happen'. Many people also commented on the lack of progress in some basic issues such as recycling and energy efficiency and questioned how we could call ourselves an Ecoversity, when we hadn't sorted out some of the basics. Overwhelmingly many people felt that the aims and objectives of Ecoversity were not being clearly communicated. For those working on Ecoversity on a day to day basis there was also a sense that Ecoversity was beginning to be strangled by bureaucracy.

The timing of the change of programme sponsor and vice chancellorship enabled Ecoversity to take a step back to reflect on how it should move forward to address those issues. Following the change academy residential it was decided that a new approach was needed. The new approach would be characterised by simplifying the approach and decision-making process; focus on cross institutional action-based task groups and to seek engagement and involvement of students and staff to help shape the programme and where appropriate be involved in delivery and oversee progress.

A new approach for Ecoversity 2007

Since October 2007 Ecoversity has entered a new phase in terms of leadership, structures, projects, delivery and communications. A key change has been to re-state to the University that we are not currently an exemplar 'sustainable' University but that Ecoversity is our vision statement of becoming a beacon for the sector.

A major part of our new approach has been to develop more effective communication with staff and students about Ecoversity, and seek engagement in the process of shaping the Ecoversity actions. Our first Ecoversity conference was held in November 2007 which attracted 80 staff and students. Using techniques from the Change Academy residential such as World Café, this process has been used to formulate key themes to inform the setting up of the Ecoversity task groups. A second conference has been held recently and the enthusiastic response to these events has led us to develop a programme of such conferences for the next 2 years.

A widespread student engagement programme of ambassadorships, internships and volunteering has been developed under the Ecoversity StuDent project.

Longitudinal research activity is very much part of Ecoversity StuDent and has started its cycles of data collection around the impacts attributable to Ecoversity.

This ongoing research programme tells us that those students who take up the ambassador, intern and volunteering opportunities within the Ecoversity framework gain many benefits and are impacted on positively. It also lets us know how hard we need to work to meet students' expectations and aspirations in relation to sustainable development matters! In parallel we have recently launched an action research project centred on producing an in-house newspaper which features Ecoversity related stories and items generated (and mostly written) by staff and students. Both the longitudinal research strand and the action research based newspaper project are part of the formative evaluation feedback loop and reflective ethos that senior management also belong to.

Challenges Ahead

The key challenge ahead is to maintain the progress made in the past few months under the new approach and to ensure we meet the expectations of staff and students that have been created. The most recent period of Ecoversity has entailed a consolidation of a number of actions and promotion of a number of activities that staff and students wanted to happen. The campus master plan and investment plan has been approved by the University which will achieve many of the ideas originally set out at the time of the launch of Ecoversity. The Sustainable Student Village project will go ahead but in a slightly different format than previously envisaged. The active communication with and engagement of a large community of staff and students around sustainable development remains an ongoing but welcome challenge. Every success we have however is a step in the right direction and our ability to learn from our actions and failings is crucial to the long term goal.

Further Information

For further information or communication on Ecoversity or this briefing paper email ecoversity@bradford.ac.uk

For more detail on Ecoversity:
www.bradford.ac.uk/ecoversity