

What is
Ecoversity?

Briefing Note No. 1

eco**o**versity
making sustainability work



WHAT IS ECOVERSITY ?

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 which aims to embed 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 had experienced chronic under-funding in its Estate for a number of years. The majority of the city centre campus is made up of building stock from the 1960 -1970 Master plan. Many of these buildings, and those at the nearby School of Health campus, internally and externally were (and are) in need of refurbishment. The city centre campus itself is dominated by internal car parks and public roads and despite 35% of the overall footprint being classed as green space, this is highly fragmented.

Secondly, data on student admissions showed that the campus was featuring as an important factor in some students rejecting the offer of a place.

Thirdly, student surveys were indicating dissatisfaction with; the quality and provision of amenities through Halls of Residence; lack of social and study space and a 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 question '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.' Gaining an audience for these types of questions 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 a term to present a vision to the University which combined our core

values, some key challenges facing the Institution and create a framework for a 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 stated that the greatest contribution the HE sector to sustainable development can make is through the education of its students. As with many Universities we had a number of pockets of teaching and research expertise in sustainable development although this was fragmented. It was evident however that many academic areas of the University had teaching programmes and research and knowledge transfer activities that were able to, or could readily, align to notions of sustainable development. The HEFCE statement therefore provided a powerful driver in the formulation of a framework for the development of the academic and educational objectives 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. Up to that point in time the University had undertaken a number of new buildings and environmental management activities that were underpinned by a commitment to sustainable development accountability frameworks such as Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM), developing an environmental management system and participating in the Carbon Trust's Higher Education Carbon Management Club.

Not surprisingly at the time of the launch Ecoversity was most strongly identified with Estates projects. This was reinforced by a new Campus Masterplan that set out a number of measures to bring more student activity and green space to the heart of the campus and to begin to refurbish large parts of the Estate. This masterplan took the opportunity to explore ways of promoting the health and well-being of staff and students; create stronger linkages with our surrounding communities and undertake design and construction work based on agreed sustainability criteria. 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. The programme board met monthly to review actions and progress and begin to establish a 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, and refurbishment took shape, the wider University began to see and experience visible change space, which provoked a mixture of reactions.

In summer 2006 the University appointed a Director of Education for Sustainable Development to develop the educational and academic framework for Ecoversity with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching). 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 emphasise the significant student focus of Ecoversity. This project was underpinned by 3 major commitments

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

In June 2007 a new Vice-Chancellor, took up office who took little time in stating 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 of the educational and student experience aspects of Ecoversity. At the outset Geoff Layer led a group of six other staff through the HEA Change Academy process, to review the progress of Ecoversity to that point in time, to identify the challenges ahead and what changes might be needed.

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. We started from a low base in a number of areas and have a long way to go. Indeed we see sustainable development, not as an end state, but as a framework for continual review, reflection and action. 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.

In parallel we have recently launched an in-house newspaper which will feature Ecoversity related stories and items generated (and mostly written) by staff and students. A widespread student engagement programme has been developed under the Ecoversity StuDent project and the longitudinal research activity of this project is collecting data and evidence of impact of Ecoversity to date and feeding this back to the University for reflection and self-learning. An overarching Ecoversity Action Group oversees the new approach and is charged with promoting action, monitoring and reviewing progress and challenging the Institution if it feels that energy levels or commitments are waning.

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 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 a formidable challenge and we anticipate further issues and challenges will arise in this current phase. 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