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Citation:

Payne, P and Blakey, E and Horsfall, JM and Young, I (2006) Promoting green issues and sustainability in UK higher education libraries. *SCONUL Focus*, 42. 57 - 60.

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# Promoting green issues and sustainability in UK higher education libraries



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## INTRODUCTION

*Philip Payne*

Climate change affects us all. Individually and collectively, we must reduce our carbon footprint to protect the future of the planet. But how can higher education libraries contribute? In April of 2007, a request was made to SCONUL libraries – via LIS-SCONUL – for information on library green initiatives that they were taking forward. The responses highlighted that there is growing interest in the issue and that sustainability issues are beginning to be taken very seriously. This is partially driven by the greater awareness of the need to reduce carbon emissions throughout

society. Specifically within higher education, it is also a result of encouragement by funding bodies, such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (see <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lgm/sustain/>), through pressure from groups such as People and Planet and their 'green league' of higher education institutions (<http://peopleandplanet.org/gogreen/greenleague2007>), and through rewards for excellence such as the Times Higher Education and Higher Education Academy Awards for an outstanding contribution by a higher education institution to sustainable development.

Library staff are often active in wider institutional sustainability initiatives and can act as 'champions' for environmental issues and initiatives. Most of the libraries that responded to the request for information have aligned their green initiatives/policies with those of their host organisation. Some libraries have participated in a wider institutional initiative to apply for the environmental management standard, ISO 14001. However, there are many specific ways that libraries can become more environmentally friendly and can make a difference. These include:

### Procurement

- purchasing recycled paper for printers and photocopiers
- encouraging suppliers to avoid unnecessary packaging
- replacing plastic bags for users with 'bags for life'
- avoiding using plastic cups at water dispensers

### Recycling

- books, journals, etc.
- PCs
- furniture
- packaging – cardboard, plastic, etc.
- toner cartridges
- floppy disks, CDs and DVDs
- glass and plastic bottles
- cans
- batteries
- for charity: milk-bottle tops, phones, stamps

### Energy efficiency

- using low-energy lighting

### Reducing waste

- encouraging people not to print everything
- making paper used only on one side available to students as scrap paper

- encouraging staff to turn off lights, PCs and other equipment when not in use

#### **Raising the awareness of staff and users**

- establishing 'green teams'
- organising staff events
- displays in the library
- reminders on staff noticeboards/newsletters
- reports at staff meetings
- sale of stationery products made from recycled materials
- establishing a 'green policy' and getting it endorsed
- volunteering initiatives for staff on conservation projects

#### **Building design**

- maximising daylight
- managing heat gain through natural ventilation
- use of recyclable materials
- installing alternative energy sources, such as solar panels
- movement-detection devices or task lighting
- use of rain water in toilets.

The case studies below describe how three libraries (Birkbeck, Leeds Metropolitan University and the University of Leeds) have engaged with environmental and sustainability issues, how each of them has taken forward this agenda and how they have achieved very positive outcomes.

#### **GREEN INITIATIVES AT BIRKBECK LIBRARY**

*Emma Blakey*

The library set up a Green Group in 2005 to raise awareness of sustainability issues amongst staff and students, and is now taking a leading role in green initiatives in the college.

One of the first things we did was to introduce recycling bins for white paper and for glass and plastic bottles in the library, both of which proved very popular with our students. We also placed recycling bins for all our coloured paper, newspapers and magazines in the staff offices, and encouraged everyone to recycle. Whilst the white paper was collected by a paper-recycling company, the remainder of the recycling was taken to the nearby public recycling bins by a group of library volunteers.

We then started to recycle all our cardboard, withdrawn books, confidential waste, printer and photocopier toner cartridges, old batteries and

certain types of plastic journal wrappings. This year, the college took on the responsibility for recycling paper by introducing recycling bins for all types of paper in all of the staff offices.

We use recycled paper in all of our printers and Forest Stewardship Council certified paper in all of our photocopiers, but we hope to use recycled paper in all our machines in the near future.

We designed 'Think Green' stickers for staff computers and all staff have been encouraged to switch off PCs when not in use and to turn off lights whenever possible. All of the staff desk lamps now use energy-saver light bulbs and we use recycled stationery as much as possible. We have a small compost bin in our tearoom, emptied each week by a member of staff who takes the contents home for her garden compost.

We have a regular 'Green Corner' column in our weekly staff newsletter, to which staff contribute, and our termly library newsletters for college staff and students now include a regular update on our latest green initiatives. Green issues are now a standing item on all of our staff meeting agendas, and we have recently set up a green library website to publicise everything we are doing (<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/about/greenlibrary>).

In May, Birkbeck organised an Environment Awareness Day, as part of the national Learning at Work scheme, with workshops on how to be more environmentally aware at work and at home. As well as being involved in the planning of the day, the library's Green Group hosted a stall on our green initiatives.

Our Birkbeck Library Fairtrade cotton bags went on sale recently and have been a resounding success. We began selling jute bags from the start of the autumn term of 2007.

We hope that through our publicity about our green initiatives colleagues elsewhere will be inspired and encouraged to take some similar steps, and to find more ways to make the work environment a greener place.

#### **GREEN INITIATIVES AT LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

*Jo Horsfall*

On 7 June 2007, Leeds Metropolitan University was named by the independent campaigning group People and Planet as the country's most environmentally friendly university (as reported

in The Guardian, <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/news/story/0,,2104028,00.html>). It was marked on a variety of criteria, including full-time environmental staff, transport strategies and recycling rates, and received 48 out of a possible 50 points.

In order to conform to the international environmental standard ISO 14001, to which the library currently holds, the library's environmental issues QUIP (Quality and Improvement) group was set up in 2004 to identify ways in which Leeds Met libraries could be more environmentally friendly. The group comprises staff from both the Civic Quarter and Headingley libraries, and our aims include identifying ways in which resources can be used more efficiently, identifying environmental training required by library staff and exchanging best practice in the university and in the higher education library sector.

Since December 2004, the group has introduced recycling bins for plastic cups and cans in the staff tearooms and provided dispensers for plastic carrier bags near the self-service machines (which proved popular with the students). We are now able to recycle plastic journal wrappings and have bins to collect them in staff workrooms. Environmental information on the noticeboards in the tearooms is regularly updated for staff interest. Acting as early innovators in environmental awareness, the group helped to arrange two successful and popular training hours for library staff that were led by the University's Environmental Project Manager, prompting us to recognise our environmental footprint. The feedback was very positive from both sessions. Topics that were discussed by the group included how to encourage staff to turn off manual printers and light switches, looking at inter-site transport and at possible ways to improve inter-site access for library staff and investigating a wide range of recycling possibilities at work.

A staff development event during Fairtrade Fortnight in 2006 was organised by the group to encourage fair trade and to give support to local suppliers. Staff were invited to try a range of Fairtrade and organic nibbles from local suppliers to encourage them to buy green. Those who participated were asked to fill out a short questionnaire about their thoughts on the goods. One result showed that 86% of staff who previously had not bought such products said they now would, compared with 14% who said they would not. A poster highlighting this initiative was submitted

in the 2006 staff development Innovation competition.

The group acts as a link between the Environmental Project Manager and the library, disseminating information about university and external initiatives. One way this is achieved is through the 'Monthly Planet' e-mail which has been developed as a result of feedback from members of staff who have been on environmental awareness workshops. The environmental project manager e-mails four or five quick points to those who are interested, on issues relating to social and environmental factors, locally, regionally and globally, to increase general awareness. The staff newsletter is also used as a way of maintaining environmental awareness.

In May 2006, the group decided to continue their work via an e-mail discussion forum where any issues of environmental concern are raised, continuing to action if appropriate.

#### **GREEN INITIATIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

*Ian Young*

Leeds University has recently won a 'Green Gown' award for continuous environmental improvement. The judges praised the university for its 'articulate strategic approach' and the way it has involved both staff and external organisations in its plans (see *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 30 March 2007, p.8).

The university has a network of environmental co-ordinators, usually including one person per school or service who helps to take forward the strategic green initiatives that are initiated by the two environmental managers. There was so much interest in the co-ordinator post in the library that it was decided to harness this enthusiasm by appointing a group of us as co-ordinators and forming a Green Group.

We have been working closely with the university on initiatives, but because we are such a large service and there is a group of us, we have managed to make quite an impact. Areas where we have had an impact include:

*Waste management:* The university introduced a recycling scheme, which involved removing waste bins from all areas and putting in recycling points. This is in operation in all libraries in both staff and public areas. Recycling has doubled from 16% to 34% in three years. We have also worked with our

waste contractor, Biffa, to ensure that bound journal volumes being withdrawn from the library are now taken for recycling without our having to remove the covers. The library has also been leading the way in the use of recycled paper and we now use it in all printers and photocopiers.

*Energy efficiency:* The university is working to reduce energy use through behaviour management and energy audits. We arranged for a talk to all staff on saving energy and have seen a significant drop in consumption through people switching items off when not in use, only printing when needed, printing double-sided and so on. Our computing service has also implemented energy shutdowns on PCs if they are not being used after a certain period. We also carried out a lighting audit of our buildings to identify where lights were on unnecessarily, such as in toilets and emergency exits, and these will be put onto PIR (passive infrared radiation) motion-detection systems.

*Library staff induction:* Another part of our behaviour management has been the development of a talk on environmental issues as part of our induction sessions for new library staff.

*Green displays:* We have produced an eye-catching display on environmental issues which goes on library display boards at all sites, with information encouraging students to recycle and to reduce energy usage.

*Jute bags:* The library used to give out plastic bags (usually sponsored) to customers who requested them. We were concerned about the message this was sending to students about the throwaway society and talked to our marketing group about selling sturdier bags instead. They managed to source a jute bag in a range of colours and designed a 'Sshhh...!' catchphrase on the side. These have become hugely popular with students, indeed becoming a 'must-have accessory' and even spawning Facebook groups. The library set up a blog to promote the bags as they travel around the world: see <http://www.communitywalk.com/librarybag>.

*Transport:* Again we have been working with the university to discourage solo driving to work by joining its car-sharing scheme, installing more bike lockers and showers and promoting the use of discounted public transport cards.

As you can see, there is a lot that can be done and a library Green Group can harness ideas and

enthusiasm to make a difference. More information on the university's initiatives can be found at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/about/environmental/>.

## **LIS-GREEN**

*Philip Payne*

A JISCMAIL mailing list, 'LIS-GREEN', has been established to encourage the exchange of experience and to promote best practice on greener and more environmentally friendly issues in libraries. There are currently 195 subscribers within academic libraries and beyond. Topics covered so far have included book recycling, using recycled paper in copiers, bike-to-work schemes, disposal of floppy disks, bags for life and paper cups for water coolers. The home page for LIS-GREEN can be found at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/lis-green.html>.