

The Bristol Method

Green Capital: Student Capital

*The power of student
sustainability engagement*

In it for good

BRISTOL
2015 EUROPEAN
GREEN CAPITAL

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Introduction: Student Capital

Becoming the European Green Capital offers an opportunity for Higher Education (HE) institutions to support their cities in releasing the full potential of the Green Capital accolade, however HE's involvement in previous Green Capitals has been limited. The Green Capital: Student Capital project has aimed to change this by putting students at the heart of Bristol's European Green Capital 2015 year, encouraging and facilitating student engagement in a wide range of both curricular and extra-curricular placement and volunteering activities with a Green Capital focus.

The University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE) and the University of Bristol – with their respective students' unions – have been working in partnership with the city and local communities, using Higher Education Funding Council for England Catalyst funding to promote student involvement in Green Capital activities across Greater Bristol.

Student Capital created a broad programme of citywide impact during European Green Capital. It delivered a programme of student and staff engagement in enhancing sustainability within the city and has developed student and staff engagement with sustainability action. Through action research approaches it is also providing lessons for how institutions can collaborate across cities and communities to have internal and external impacts for sustainability.

The project has been uniquely timed to explore this in the context of Bristol Green Capital 2015, the first UK city to achieve this designation, and in which the two Universities have already been instrumental in developing and sustaining the Bristol Green Capital Partnership of over 850 organisations.

Why focus on student engagement?

Bristol has a university student population of approximately 50,000 – comprising 10% of the population of the entire city!

This represents an enormous potential, and in 2015 the Student Capital project mobilised the student community to tackle the challenging sustainability issues facing our city, our society, and our planet.

Many of the sustainability issues which we face require action at the community level. HE institutions are most often well connected within their area – they can have good links with local organisations and many of their staff and students live and work as a part of the community. Therefore, HE institutions are well placed to engage with local communities, and have the opportunity to connect students with organisations through a number of pathways – for example through volunteering opportunities, placements, internships, or projects.

Student Capital aims to have a positive impact for all involved: the city public and economy benefit through increased student engagement; the HE institutions benefit through enhanced collaborative working and enhanced recognition of the collective role of HE within the city economy and community; and students benefit from a step change in collaboration and engagement.

The overarching aim of the Student Capital project is twofold:

- (i) To contribute Bristol's citywide European Green Capital aim to create a sustainable inclusive city, through mobilising the student community in that transformation.
- (ii) To support students to develop change agent skills through engaging in the transformation of their city. Students are the sustainable citizens for the future, and their engagement with sustainability throughout the Green Capital year not only has huge benefits for the city during 2015, but also in the decades to come wherever they settle.

To achieve the above, the Green Capital: Student Capital project has followed five main objectives:

1. To create an increase in student engagement in business, community and voluntary sector organisations through fostering student and community links
2. To foster an awareness in the wider community of the potential scale of impact of students as positive change agents,
3. To undertake dissemination activities to examine the role of HE in Green Capital initiatives, aimed at ensuring wider impacts
4. To conduct a robust evaluation of the project activities to understand the impact and value of student engagement
5. To demonstrate the potential for universities and their Student Unions to work together across institutions to contribute to community change.

Beyond the core objectives listed for the Green Capital year, the Student Capital project has focussed on the legacy of Bristol 2015, with the aim at all times being that the increased student engagement in sustainable issues continues into the future, and that the new systems/platforms which have been created can support this.

In this sense the Student Capital project is not a one-off series of "flash in the pan" interventions designed to simply end at the close of 2015, rather it is "raising the bar" for the universities and setting the level at which student engagement in Bristol's developing green economy will continue in the future.

The motto for Bristol 2016 is: "It doesn't stop here", and the Student Capital embodies this passion to continue promoting and celebrating the good work of students.



Who is this report for?

This report is for anyone seeking to increase sustainability engagement. In it we tell the story of the Student Capital project, explaining the processes and the outcomes, and suggesting pieces of advice and lessons for what went well, and what could have been done better or differently.

For councils and local authorities

This report is useful in understanding the value of your local HE institutions in addressing sustainability issues, and demonstrates the power of engaging the student community to work as a force for positive change.

For HE institutions

This report is useful in providing examples of the process of increasing student sustainability engagement within and across institutions. The report discusses what the outcomes of a dedicated engagement project have been, and describes the novel methods by which these were obtained.

For students

This report is useful in showing you how valuable your work can be, and the importance of taking a leading role in action for a more sustainable future. The report contains information about the different ways in which the Student Capital project created routes for getting involved, and can hopefully give you some ideas to try out in your own institution.

For local businesses and community groups

This report is useful as it tells the story of how engaging with HE institutions can provide a valuable resource in terms of committed and passionate students who are keen to work with you and help your organisation meet its sustainability objectives. The report contains a number of stories from organisations which were involved with the Student Capital project.

At-a-glance

The value of Student Capital

The Student Capital project has from the start followed a methodology of partnership and cooperation between the universities. This novel approach involved new learning about inter-institutional practices and working within the city. Below are number of examples of the value of Student Capital in terms of the ways in which the project has impacted upon students, the institutions, and the wider city.

- Student Capital has demonstrated that students can be significant agents for change in the community when relationships are properly brokered and supported, at both a macro and micro scale.
- It has shown that a structured approach to student engagement in sustainability beyond the academy can transform students' understanding of what a sustainable life is and their role in the community, and foster the skills and experience they need for those lives.
- Bristol has a student population approaching 50,000, and this is going to be the case for many years to come; the student population therefore represents almost 10% of the city's population. It's clear then that the student community is potentially a vital human resource for any city serious about tackling sustainability. A key lesson on the value of student engagement from the Student Capital is that if cities work with their HE institutions in this way, they will unlock phenomenal access to this huge community of passionate and highly skilled people.
- Student Capital has established of a firm foundation for ongoing sustainability action across the city. An essential aspect of this has been a focus on the *visibility* of student engagement to the community. Through its ambitious engagement targets and support for an exceptionally broad range of different activities, the Student Capital has had a cumulative effect on Bristol's sustainability consciousness – focussing the public spotlight on sustainability engagement and demonstrating just what is possible through collective action. In this way, students' activities are not only a force for good in Bristol and the wider region, but through their visibility serve also as inspirational examples for members of the community.
- The Student Capital has been successful in large part due to its experimentalist governance approach to promoting and increasing engagement. The project is hosted between the two universities, both as equal partners, and both eager to try out new approaches and innovative methods for tapping into the potential of the student community. Through enshrining this flexibility at the core of the project, it has been possible to focus on establishing what really counts in terms of engagement, and also to be responsive to what it is that both students and organisations want to do. In the end, all that any student engagement project can hope to be is a successful and useful conduit for directing and harnessing the passion of the students, and so to be responsive to what it is that drives those passions and what excites students to want to engage is critical.

- The project has been developed and run by two Universities and their student unions. It has demonstrated a method of partnership that is successful but not bureaucratic. It has established that large HE institutions can work together to a set of common aims without having to structure their respective activities in exactly the same way. Both universities and their Unions have faced the challenge of conducting the Student Capital project within their own respective institutional structures, and to attempt to force a particular model or way of working would have been disadvantageous. The project has shown that so long as the activities within different institutions are *encouraging the same outcomes*, things don't always have to be done the same way. These outcomes need to be clear to external partners, and enable comparability within the project, but with sensitivity to the fact that there is great richness in experimentalist approaches around how to implement agreed aims. The next stage for the institutions is to embed these new ways of working within existing university processes and structures.
- It has shown the importance of scale to successful and continuing partnerships. Whilst individual elements may have a life cycle, if there is a strong core relationship this does not affect the overall success of the project. Thus the two Universities and the Bristol Green Capital partnership of over 850 organisations have a strong relationship. Within this, individual projects may come and go, initiatives may start and not succeed – but the overall momentum can continue. This reduces the risks and brokerage costs of creating and sustaining each individual relationship.
- Building Momentum and Fostering Dialogue are vital to the success of University–Community partnerships, simply to enable possible partners to spot each other. This meta-project approach makes it easier to build that momentum quickly, and for each individual project to draw upon that momentum and dialogue from the start rather than having to build its own.
- The institutions have benefitted from a stronger city profile, particularly in areas where the Universities have historically been less well known. Cities recognise universities contribute to the local economy as large local employers and through international research reputation. This method harnesses student potential not just as spenders in the local economy, but as a massive positive resource for the city to assist in transformative projects.



Impact: What did Student Capital achieve?

- Students in Bristol have given 109,730 hours of their time to engaging with local organisations and tackling issues of sustainability in the city and wider region. This equates to 64.5 years' worth of work provided to date, and an economic contribution of £1,051,736.
- The Student Capital project has been instrumental in engaging over 7,500 students in the Green Capital year.
- The Student Capital project has celebrated and rewarded the efforts of students through the new Change Maker award. This award is given to students that have given both their time and effort to tackling the sustainability challenges we face. There is also the Gold Change Maker award, which is given to those students who have made an outstanding contribution.
- In addition to the dissemination activities described above, the Student Capital was also a finalist for the national 2015 Green Gown Awards in the Student Engagement category, based on only the first six months of the project. The competition judges commended the Student Capital project as: *"A well-designed project of impressive scale and addressing vital issues of employability skills and the contribution of students to the city."*
- Student Capital has generated significant academic output about student sustainability engagement which demonstrates the value of involving Higher Education institutions in tackling the key challenges we face in society today. This knowledge base will be made available via the Student Capital Repository.
- The Student Capital project has created Skills Bridge as a legacy for the ongoing partnership between students, the Universities, and organisations across the city and the region.



The Challenge

The Student Capital project faced a number of challenges in promoting and increasing sustainability engagement. Below the main challenges are explained, with the aim being that these might provide useful learning points for other institutions seeking to conduct a similar project:

- **Working together:** Whilst collaboration between HE institutions is relatively commonplace in certain areas (for example in research), collaboration on projects to engage students or improve the local community is relatively uncommon – particularly on such a large scale. The project has seen the creation of a strong working partnership between the two Universities and the student unions, however the process has not been without its challenges – for example in integrating the different working approaches and cultures in the different institutions. The project is ground-breaking for the Universities in being a completely collaborative project between both institutions and both student unions as equal partners directing and implementing the project.
- **Securing funding:** With the best will in the world, creating a large-scale change in student engagement requires the financial commitment to support it. The universities worked together on the bid for the project, and this collaborative approach allowed them to secure the funding necessary to make it a success.
- **Acquiring good-quality information:** The Student Capital project was established within the existing structures of the two universities. This provided fantastic potential for linking with different services, faculties, and modules already running at the institutions, but also presented a challenge in terms of understanding exactly what was *already going on* at the universities in relation to student sustainability engagement. For example, both universities had existing volunteering teams, working with students in a range of areas. Students were already engaging in placements and internships across the city, and were undertaking projects in all kinds of subjects related to sustainability. The aim of the Student Capital was to build on these fantastic activities during the Green Capital year, and expand these to a larger proportion of the student population. To do this required a good grasp of the existing structures of the institutions, and detailed information about what was already going on – some of which was challenging to collect. The best way to do this was to work closely with the volunteering and placements teams at the two universities, and use the existing expertise available to help shape the project.
- **Getting the students interested:** Anyone familiar with student engagement will know that in general it is easy to engage a small minority of the student body – those who might already have a passion and energy for the issue at hand – and yet it is much more challenging to engage the remaining majority of the student population who might have little interest in getting involved, and who also lack the knowledge of how to do so. Student Capital has sought to combat this issue and be a project which encourages engagement from a much broader proportion of the student population than is typically achieved. A number of novel methods were adopted for this and these are explained in greater detail in the following pages.
- **Establishing a strong legacy:** The Green Capital title is a catalyst for sustainability action in the city which holds it. The title provides a focal point and brings issues of sustainability to the fore. This is undoubtedly a positive thing, however it also carries a risk that once the title has moved on to the next city, the increased visibility of sustainability fades and the enthusiasm for change generated throughout the year ebbs away. Throughout the Student

Capital project it has been important to establish a strong legacy, one which can maintain and improve upon the successes of the Green Capital in the years which follow. In this way the sustainability actions achieved in the Green Capital year represent the benchmark for future years, capitalising on the increased interest and enthusiasm generated and taking this forwards.

It's not about being a "flash in the pan", it's about raising the bar for generations to come.



Creating Change: How to increase engagement

A number of questions immediately come to mind when considering how to increase engagement:

- What is meant by 'engagement'?
- Who is the target population?
- What levels of engagement will be considered a 'success'?
- How will engagement be maintained?

In response to such questions, a number of clear engagement objectives were set for the Student Capital project which set a clear scope for the project, and assisted in keeping the project focussed and providing a benchmark against which to measure success.

Student Capital engagement objectives

1. 100,000 hours of student engagement in Green Capital activity – volunteering, placements, internships, and much more
2. Two cohorts of Green Capital “Change Makers” – students formally recognised and awarded for their efforts by their universities
3. A minimum of 600 students engaged in some form of sustainability engagement – volunteering, placements, internships
4. A minimum of 180 organisations hosting a student voluntary project

A number of different approaches were employed to meet these objectives. The project aimed to increase engagement amongst all students and across the full range of the universities' activities, this included both curricular and extra-curricular engagement. The everyday activities of HE institutions create numerous opportunities for different types of engagement.

The main routes through which students were engaged were:

Volunteering – working closely with the volunteering teams and student unions at each institution for maximum reach and to take advantage of pre-existing systems and networks

Placements and internships – working with the relevant teams at each institution, suitable courses with a sustainability aspect identified as opportunities for engagement. Additionally, a set of Green Capital internships were created especially for 2015

Projects – working with academic staff it was possible to use the Green Capital year as a focal point for student projects on modules related to sustainability. This was great for both students and staff, and created a very involved learning experience – conducting valuable work with strong relevance to both local and global issues

Student engagement

As the figures currently stand, students at the institutions have given 109,730 hours of their time to sustainability engagement in Bristol and the wider region. This figure equates to 64.5 years' worth of work towards sustainability given by students to Green Capital 2015, and a contribution of £1,051,736¹ to the region's green economy.

The students have surpassed the Student Capital target figure and this is a testament to the hard work of our students, and the value of student engagement in helping to address issues of sustainability.

Students Engaged		Organisations hosting students	
Target No	Actual No	Target No	Actual No
600	7,537	180	205

Of the 7,537 students engaged in sustainability related activities, a set of criteria were defined to select a sub-set of particularly engaged students, and recognise these for the outstanding nature of their contributions to Green Capital year – through a newly-created award for the Student Capital project, titled: The Green Capital Change Maker Awards.

2,250 students were selected for their contributions of time and effort to addressing issues of sustainability across the Green Capital year. These students took part in a vast range of volunteering projects, placements, and internships, and their efforts are a real credit both to the Universities and to the city.

The Student Capital project built on the four-step approach to embedding sustainability into the student experience developed by Bristol SU (see Get Green Report). Supported by education and action-learning theory the approach aims to make sustainability a social norm amongst the Bristol student population.

The figures in the table above for organisations include only those which hosted students. Beyond this, a far larger number were engaged. In total, 2,324 people from 2,014 organisations were contacted with the offer of taking part in Student Capital and forming a partnership with the Universities.

¹ The economic contribution was calculated based on assumptions of an average 37 hour working week and 46 week working year, using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) 2014 figure for median UK hourly income (excluding overtime) of £11.61 for volunteering and project work hours, and the institutions' standard wage for placements and internships of £6.75 per hour.

The Change Makers

Students have given their time and energy to the Green Capital, and the Student Capital wanted to celebrate and reward this commitment. The Green Capital Change Maker award was created to provide a tangible accolade for students to mark their accomplishment and to create a sense of pride and recognition in the city.

Two awards ceremonies were held – one in June 2015 and one in February 2016. The awards were presented by Dr Andrew Garrad, Chairman of the Bristol 2015 Board of Directors.



Dr Garrad explained the importance of student engagement in Bristol Green Capital:



“It is vital that young people are engaged in the greening of our society. In Bristol 2015 we have encouraged that through the primary schools education programme, the Green Youth Day and now through the active engagement of our two universities: ‘Green Capital – Student Capital’. Today we are recognising some students who have done exceptional work of all different types – the Change Makers. Well done!”

The ceremonies saw hundreds of students recognised for their efforts, with projects that included:

- Increasing the breadth of recycling activities on university campuses
- Delivering lessons on sustainability in primary schools
- Campaigning to reduce consumption of plastic bags and single-use plastic items
- Creating a student long-term bicycle hire scheme
- Raising awareness of homelessness by getting groups of students to knit items for donations
- Writing business plans for local NGOs
- Volunteering for local organisations
- Campaigning for divestment from fossil fuels
- Running a “BioBlitz” on the University precinct

In both Universities a wide range of different activities qualifies a student to be a Change Maker, and the criteria represent equivalent levels of engagement.

Generally speaking, the aim of the Student Capital has been to have as broad a range of students involved as possible, and to count activity in all aspects of sustainability:

- Environmental
- Economic
- Social
- Cultural

The Student Capital expanded upon these core types of sustainability, and included 11 classes of sustainability which were used in the criteria for becoming a Change Maker. Students could be a Change Maker if they had engaged in an activity related to one or more of the following:

- Food
- Energy
- Nature and/or biodiversity
- Transport/travel
- Health/well-being
- Waste/recycling/ re-use
- Poverty
- Human rights
- Community development
- Education (primary or secondary)
- Sustainability in business



To further broaden the accessibility of the Change Maker award, two levels of award were created to recognise the diversity in the type and extent of students' engagement. For example, the award was open to students who might already be heavily engaged in sustainability action at the university, and so would have lots of activity to report on; but also it was trying to reach those who had not engaged before and so wouldn't have much or any activity to report on. The two levels of the award recognised the different amounts of time and effort that different students had put in – celebrating and promoting the efforts of all students that engaged, but offering the opportunity to achieve a higher level of award for those students that had gone above and beyond normal levels of engagement.

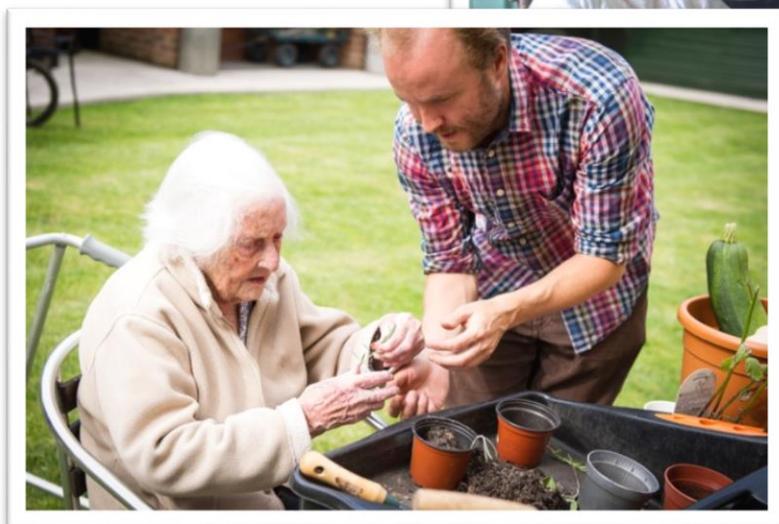
Change Maker: This was awarded to any student that had engaged in 7.5 hours' worth (one day) of sustainability activity. In addition, a student must have shared their experience in some way (for example by talking about it on social media, a blog, presentation, etc.).

Gold Change Maker: This is the higher level award designed to recognise significant effort and engagement. For this the student must have completed 25 hours of engagement, and have shared the experience in some way (for example by talking about it on social media, a blog, presentation, etc.). This level of the award links in to the universities' existing extracurricular employability programmes (UWE's 'Bristol Futures Award', and the University of Bristol's 'PLUS Award'). This provided an additional incentive, because being a Gold Change Maker could count towards a further institutional award.

As the Student Capital is a novel project, the universities have tested two different approaches to how achievement is certified, and are exploring the impact of encouraging students to share news of their activities with others.

The two routes for certification for the award were: student-led and staff-led.

1. **Student-led certification:** for this route, an online form was created asking for students to submit their personal information alongside the details of the activity they had conducted. In addition, students were required to provide the name of a member of staff that could certify their activity.
2. **Staff-led certification:** in particular circumstances, such as large group work, student-led certification was not the most effective method. For these cases, a staff form was created where an activity leader could certify the activities of a group of students, and provide their details for follow-up.
3. Whilst not always practical, the preferred method of certification was student-led, as this provided the opportunity for additional data collection in the certification process which provided useful feedback.



THE CHANGE MAKERS



Unleashing the power of Bristol's student community during Green Capital year

Green Capital

Bristol is the European Green Capital for 2015. To support this, the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol are working in partnership on a joint project - *Student Capital* - which places students at the heart of Bristol Green Capital and aims to achieve 100,000 hours of student engagement in green activities across the city and beyond.

"I believe that for a city to serve the people, the people must shape it. This means every inhabitant of Bristol has a responsibility to do their share of the shaping using their capabilities."

2015 CHANGE MAKER: BESIANA SINANA, BSC BIOLOGY VOLUNTEER SURVEY WORK FOR BRISTOL TREE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

"Volunteering during Bristol's year as European Green Capital has exceeded my expectations. It has helped me learn a lot more about Bristol as well as enriching my student life in the UK."

2015 CHANGE MAKER: YI ZENG, MSc NUTRITION, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH VOLUNTEERED AT FOOD CONNECTIONS FESTIVAL, WALK FOR HEALTH, CHANGES BRISTOL, AND MORE



Change Makers in action

From sponsored knitting missions and upcycling old clothes to helping vulnerable women regain their confidence through entrepreneurial initiatives, Bristol's students are devising imaginative projects to demonstrate the benefits of sustainable living.



Rewarding Change Makers

Students' contributions to Green Capital 2015 are being recognised and celebrated through the **Change Maker award**. Students who have contributed to Green Capital 2015 are being given the title of Change Maker and awarded with a certificate. You can become a *Change Maker*, just get involved and tell us about it using the web links at the end of this article. Not only will your efforts be great for our city, community, and environment - they will also be great for your CV!



Enactus - belief in the transformative power of entrepreneurship

The Enactus student society worked with a local cycle company to develop a business model, conduct market research and find a suitable location for a permanent shop.

"It gave me confidence to go for it, a chance to experiment and an opportunity to see what sells. It gave me the belief to move to Bristol. I now sell three times as many bikes."

DAN BRADSHAW, LOCAL CYCLE SHOP OWNER

North Bristol Food Bank - providing advice and support to clients



"Volunteering makes a huge difference to the student experience and helps deepen your understanding by reaching out into the wider community."

2015 CHANGE MAKER: STEPHANIE DENNING, PHD GEOGRAPHY, RECIPIENT OF BRISTOL HUB SOCIAL LEADERSHIP AWARD

Working with Community in Partnership Knowle West -

Students helped this local organisation find focus for its community development work.

"We felt that the students thoroughly understood our business and produced an excellent business plan that is really going to help us going forward. It has been fantastic to work with the University."

LIZ CHEETHAM, BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL'S TENANT PARTICIPATION TEAM



BECOME A GREEN CAPITAL CHANGE MAKER (IN THREE SIMPLE STEPS...)



- 1. Think of something you would like to do** to help address a sustainability challenge
- 2. Get involved.** Contact the volunteering teams at the universities with your idea or to see what opportunities they can offer
- 3. Tell us all about it** and get in touch using the links below

"The students were a pleasure to work with - flexible, committed, reliable and professional."

BRISTOL REFUGEE RIGHTS

MAKE CONTACT, MAKE CHANGE

"There's a big knowledge gap around sustainability and what it means for people. You have to find something that helps people care by making it relevant to their lives."

AMY WALSH, BRISTOL STUDENTS' UNION GREEN FUND PROJECT COORDINATOR

"It's inspiring to work with students who are standing up and demanding change and who are equipped with the drive and passion to create innovative solutions."

LAURA-KATE HOWELLS, HEAD OF UWE STUDENTS' UNION GREEN LEADERS TEAM

"Change Makers has made a brilliant contribution to setting a new ambition for student and university engagement into the future."

GARY TOPP, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, BRISTOL GREEN CAPITAL PARTNERSHIP CIC

CONTACTS

University of the West of England
uwe.ac.uk/studentcapital
uwe.ac.uk/volunteer
Contact: Billy Clayton,
studentcapital@uwe.ac.uk

University of Bristol
bristol.ac.uk/green-capital
bristol.ac.uk/gelgreen
Contact: Chris Willmore,
chris.willmore@bristol.ac.uk

Other useful contacts
bristolhub.org
businessbasecamp.co.uk
bristol2015.co.uk

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Skills Bridge

Whilst HE institutions have huge potential for creating engagement opportunities for students, external partnerships with sustainability-focussed organisations are a crucial aspect of a comprehensive sustainability engagement programme. One of the outcomes of the Student Capital has been a recognition that engagement is a two-way street, and one of the most important issues in encouraging engagement with external organisations is the ease with which such organisations can find information on what student support is available, and how to go about connecting with students.

Over the course of the project it has become clear that there is a need to make it easier for external organisations to find this information, and to get connected in to the institution. For many external organisations, the universities were not particularly 'approachable' in terms of the information that is readily available on student activities (for example case studies of existing projects, contact information, etc.).

To improve this and provide a simple route through which organisations can connect in to the universities, an online platform has been created called Skills Bridge (www.skillsbridge.ac.uk). Skills Bridge is jointly-hosted between the two institutions, and contains examples of engagement.



It provides an explanation of the skills which students can bring to organisations, contains a range of different case studies of projects happening at the universities, and importantly, provides a contact mechanism through which external organisations can connect and request information or provide opportunities for engagement.

Skills Bridge has been designed as a part of the legacy of the Student Capital. It is not limited to the Green Capital year and the intention is for this to become one of the main pathways through which external organisations can make contact with the universities and get students engaged in sustainability activities in the local area.

Check out some of our
great projects

Want to collaborate?

For more information on making your project live or
getting involved please get in touch

Student engagement case studies

Click on the images below to find out more, and explore many other examples of student engagement:



Projects and organisations

Below is a sample of the projects brokered by Student Capital. These are just a few examples of the huge range of activities taking place across the universities. For more information, please get in touch using the contact details at the end of this document.

Project brokered	
1	<p>Parkhive</p> <p>This project is a partnership with the Bristol Parks Forum.</p> <p>The ParkHive is a project aimed at increasing the accessibility of our parks and green spaces in the city, and they do this in a variety of ways, from providing people with information, to collecting a picture repository of all the beautiful spots around the city as a promotional tool.</p>
2	<p>Way to Grow</p> <p>This project is a partnership with a number of local community groups. Way to Grow is a gardening project that aims to get students involved in conservation and sustainability around Bristol.</p>
3	<p>Creative Club</p> <p>This project is a partnership with the Milestones Trust. Creative Club supports adults with learning disabilities to get involved in creative/craft activities, utilising the skills and experience of our arts students and developing their skills in planning, facilitation and communications skills.</p>
4	<p>Windmill Hill Farm</p> <p>Students went down for the afternoon to help the farm with turning their car park into a community garden space.</p> <p>We are also developing a project with the farm to create a cross-curricular group of students to help with updating the education's resources about sustainable farming for the public.</p>
5	<p>Schools project</p> <p>This project is a partnership with a number of secondary schools in Bristol. Trained students have been visiting secondary schools around the Bristol area to engage students in sustainability.</p>
6	<p>Balloon Bikes</p> <p>Balloon Bikes is a bike hire scheme for students established and run by a team of students.</p>

Telling the Story

The impact of the good work of students and the years of effort put in to the project was maximised by telling the story of the Student Capital. It is vital in any project of this type that an effective dissemination strategy is created. As an academic institution, there was the opportunity for a range of different types of publication to be produced, ranging from **peer reviewed journal papers**, through **press releases** and **reports** such as this one, all the way to **videos** and **social media content**.

Again, it was useful here to develop a strong set of objectives related to dissemination, to ensure that the best publicity was created for the project, and as-such it's reach and impact were maximised:

Student Capital publicity objectives

1. The organisation and hosting of two international conferences
2. A minimum of four academic papers generated and published in peer-reviewed journals
3. The creation of a Green Student Press Officer post for 2015 to record case-studies of Green Capital activities
4. The establishment of an online archive of Green Capital: Student Capital material, benefitting universities, organisations, and student volunteers in future Green Capital cities

Building the dialogue

To get people energised and to create a big impact, you need to tell a strong story about the importance of student sustainability engagement. We employed a number of methods to build up the visibility of the project and present it in a way which was both exciting and accessible.

At its heart, the Student Capital followed the simple message that by working together, students have the power to change their city and their society for the better. By staying focussed on this message, it was easy to explain to students, organisations, and members of the community exactly what the Student Capital is about, which was invaluable for promotion.

Coupled with the simplicity of its core message, Student Capital employed the powerful ambition of 100,000 hours of student engagement. Whilst being a target, we quickly realised that this figure was also a very useful promotional tool. The ambitious and catchy '100,000 hours' meant that the project was very memorable for people, and so became an easy talking point amongst anyone who had heard of the project and was discussing what was happening in the city during the Green Capital year. The value of this strapline was particularly evident in its use by public figures when speaking at public engagements and events. In this way the Student Capital target became a memorable piece of 'data' which people outside of the project could easily recall, and so it became a part of the general conversation about Green Capital, which was great for publicity and the visibility of the project.

Web presence

Beyond the core message, a strong online presence was essential to spreading the word about Student Capital, and for providing an easy route for students to engage. Dedicated Student Capital pages were set up on each of the universities' websites, and these both provided information about getting involved, whilst at the same time providing a place for students to record their activities and apply to become Change Makers.

If you are interested in seeing these pages, please follow the links below:

UWE Student Capital

University of Bristol Student Capital

Accompanying the more 'traditional' web-page presence, the Student Capital was promoted using social media. A number of different sites were employed for this purpose. For this, the Student Capital message was made a part of the media content promoted through the universities existing sustainability pages on sites such as Facebook. We decided not to make a specific Student Capital 'group' because social media works differently to the 'standard' webpage format of providing information or links to other pages; social media is about fostering relationships between people and the groups and activities that they choose to follow, befriend, or like. Many people are already overloaded with information and updates from their existing groups and friends on social media, and we thought that adding yet another group into this mix and trying to get people to understand its unique qualities would be a potentially time-consuming and frustrating process – particularly considering that the message being delivered was perfectly aligned with the existing sustainability channels.

If you are interested in visiting these Facebook pages to see some examples of the ongoing sustainability engagement at the universities, follow the links below:

Bristol SU Get Green

Green UWE

Student Capital Press Officer

A number of the project aims created novel engagement opportunities. For example, in the case of press coverage, the project recruited a Green Capital Press Officer to a paid placement position. A student was recruited from amongst students studying for their Journalism degree at one of the universities; this had a double benefit of fulfilling one of the student's learning outcomes – finding a placement opportunity in their final year – whilst at the same time creating dedicated and high quality press materials for the project and contributing to the project's engagement objectives.

The press officer followed key Green Capital events, and having a dedicated press presence on the Student Capital team meant that coverage for particularly important event could be assured.

In discussion with academic staff from the journalism degree during the planning phase, there was a strong desire for the press officer to perform a journalistic role, and avoid becoming simply another route by which to produce 'PR pieces'. The press officer was given a free brief to report on the Student Capital, showing the process 'warts and all', and this produced stories which were both interesting and informative, helping to understand the value of the project whilst at the same time identifying challenges and areas for improvement.

The Value of Bristol 2015

Story by: Liam Lawrence

Student Capital Press Officer

There's no doubt that Bristol 2015 helped us grow as an already environmentally conscious city, and thrust the importance of sustainability into the public domain. As I learnt over the course of the numerous events I attended, the general consensus is one that students are the key to furthering the message. The tricky part is captivating, engaging, and inspiring them to continue working towards this common goal once the initial burst of passion has subsided.

The question I'm now asking, is how effective has Green Capital been in promoting real change in our community and in students' attitudes towards it?

I put some questions to students to find out. I asked about the impacts they believed the award had had on the city and what positive changes, if any, had come about because of it. 54 people responded to my questionnaire, exploring both the successes and failures of Green Capital through the eyes of those that experienced it.

The first question asked the students whether they considered themselves to be an 'environmentally conscious person' before Bristol 2015. A large majority of them – 87% - felt that yes, they were already doing their bit for the environment. Now this could be something as everyday as recycling or remembering to turn off lights and water to save money and energy. In one person's case they had previously worked at a sustainability company so they were ahead of the curve. In

today's day and age however, it is relatively easy to feel like one of the "good guys" in regards to environmentalism. Websites such as Avaaz and 38Degrees allow people at home to easily contribute to 'clicktivism' campaigns which consist of simply signing a petition. However, every little helps, so onto the next question.

Then second question looked at whether Bristol 2015 had inspired the students to be more sustainable in their day-to-day life. In this case 83% of people responded negatively, in stark contrast to the first set of answers. However, in a lot of cases this was due to the participant stating they were not taught anything they didn't already know or practice. In some responses Bristol was criticised for this, with one participant claiming that there was a lack of "truly green incentives", and one claiming to have been completely ignorant of the fact that we were the European Green Capital at all!

The final question was where I received the most insightful responses. I asked whether the students believe the year had had a positive impact, either on the city as a whole or on themselves. 63% of responses were negative and saw the year as a missed opportunity, whilst 37% thought that there had been some real positive impacts. We'll get the bad out of the way first.

The only physical change mentioned was the new cycle path along Baldwin Street in the city centre. Although there is no doubt it is a

lovely, two-lane path, I myself struggled to think of another major physical change that benefited the people of Bristol and came about as a direct result of 2015. Although this could be due to the fact the meaning of the award wasn't properly conveyed to the public. It rewards work already ongoing or completed, shining a light on a city truly exhibiting sustainable values – and doing its utmost to live up to those. Funding was limited so it was never a case of “have millions of pounds, build loads of stuff”, and it is a shame the true purpose of the award may have been lost on people.

Another person believed that money had been wasted on “art projects” and criticised these as not having any real worth. This is contentious. With the amount of publicity and added tourism to the city that installations such as Theaster Gates' Sanctum brought, it's hard to argue that a focus on art as a medium of communication throughout 2015 is a bad thing. Although of course, a bombed-out church full of orchestras, rappers, and poets, etc., may not be to everyone's taste, but it adds to the rich tapestry of artworks happening in the city, and of course money raised as a result of it just might contribute to the broader culture of the city.

Another brief response bemoaned the fact that the only change they seemed to have witnessed was more “Londoners/Hipsters”. Now, being a Londoner myself I can safely say this is a wonderful thing as we are all bloody lovely. “Hipsters”? Well... you can make up your own mind on that one. A worrying point that cropped up twice however, was the insistence that Bristol should never have received the award in the first place, being one of the most heavily congested cities in the country. Another that came up consistently was that the year itself was more of a “vanity project”, a way to promote the city as a whole while simultaneously doing nothing to improve it.

Although many people were quick to criticise Bristol's tenure as European Green Capital, there were others who staunchly defended it. Many didn't see the fact that it was used to

raise awareness or the profile of the city as a negative thing. Bristol is already a very progressive city and one which many people are drawn to for this exact reason. With the added accolade of Green Capital under its belt, Bristol has established itself as environmentally conscious on the international stage and one that is drawing people in from all countries. One response just said it was great to know that the people who live in this city care as much as they do. If you're one of the many people who are eco-conscious in your day-to-day life, knowing this can definitely be a reassuring thought.

At the end of it all and already a few months into 2016, I think it's safe to say people are still divided. This was always going to be the case though, no matter which route Bristol had gone down and how it had spent its time as European Green Capital. There are of course some noticeable changes and the profile of the city has definitely been raised but looking back on some of the points made we have to wonder, is that really enough? This is not one of those things you can just rewind and have another crack at.

On balance though, Bristol has had its year and it was a good year. Maybe the problem is more that people are very quick to criticise, slow to act. The city doesn't need a year, award, or any form of recognition to champion these sustainable values.

I believe 2015's crowning achievement was simply opening people's eyes to different ways of doing things and hopefully instilling in them a different belief system. It's just up to us to keep it going.

Academic outputs

Being situated within two universities, the Student Capital project has been in a prime position to produce high-quality academic output which explores and explains the outcomes of the project, and critiques the process.

During the Green Capital year, the Student Capital hosted two international sustainability conferences, using Bristol as an ideal location during its Green Capital year from which to hold important discussions about the future of our environment and communities. Details of these two conferences are below.

Conference 1: ESD Learning from the Sharp End: Implications for sustainability in Higher Education (7th – 8th September, 2015).

The University of the West of England and the University of Bristol hosted a symposium looking at the future of Education for Sustainable Development. The focus of the event was on how to best enable students to make a difference to sustainability, and featured a range of interesting speakers including EAUC's Chief Executive Iain Patton, who led on a Leadership Roundtable exploring the challenges of delivering ESD in the current policy environment. This event was held in the context of Bristol being the 2015 European Green Capital, and was a fantastic demonstration of the city's green credentials.



The two-day programme included a great deal of interesting debate and discussion, with delegates going home with new ideas on how to better engage with their students. One interesting example of this was Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) global summit game, which was a simulation of political power and negotiation between international blocs with the aim of agreeing on six SDGs for the next ten years.

Conference 2: EUROCITIES Environment Forum meeting and Covenant of Mayors workshop (7th-9th October 2015).

This event was hosted at Bristol University and a number of locations around the city. Delegates from across Europe met and discussed the opportunities for pan-European cooperation by universities in support of Green Capital

Conference 3: Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC) 2016 conference: Plenary panel.

As a part of the 2016 conference, members of the student capital team hosted a plenary panel to discuss and reflect upon the successes, challenges, and lessons of the Bristol Green Capital 2015 year. This was an important dissemination opportunity and provided the

opportunity to continue the debate about the ways in which student engagement for sustainability action can be facilitated and promoted.

The universities have also presented papers on the project to a number of academic conferences, with the intention that a number of these be developed for submission to journals as a part of the Student Capital legacy. A summary of these papers to-date is provided below.

	Papers generated	Presented at/published in
1	Student sustainability engagement as a locale for developing intercultural competencies	European Network on HE for Sustainable Development
2	Student Capital: Green Capital building university – student- city partnerships	World Environmental Education Congress
3	Action Learning Projects for Sustainability - Lessons from a Higher Education Setting	Sustainable Schools Alliance National Conference
4	Student Capital in green cities - building university – student – city coalitions (book chapter)	Engaging Stakeholders in Education for Sustainable Development at University Level
5	Experiences of ‘reflective Action’: Forging links between student informal activity and curriculum learning for sustainability (book chapter)	Transformative Approaches to Sustainable Development at Universities: World Sustainability Series
6	Relational thinking and education for sustainability: Implications for student experience in HE	World Symposium on Sustainability Universities
7	Reflective action: forging links between student informal activity and curriculum learning for sustainability	Education for Sustainability in Higher Education, Achievements and Prospects Conference
8	Exploring the postgraduate ESD experience in UWE’s MSc Environmental Management	‘Learning from the Sharp End’: Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium
9	Importance of informal curriculum and academic involvement in supporting sustainability engagement	‘Learning from the Sharp End’: Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium

	Papers generated	Presented at/published in
10	Green Capital Student Capital: Working across institutions to deliver value to the city	'Learning from the Sharp End': Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium
11	Creating an online brokerage system for connecting students with opportunities to gain sustainability experience	'Learning from the Sharp End': Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium
12	Partnership working and the role of universities and students to create a Green Capital	'Learning from the Sharp End': Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium
13	Growing Greentechies? Inculcating sustainability thinking for IT undergraduates from induction	'Learning from the Sharp End': Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium
14	Sustainability and the Informal Curriculum: Innovative approaches to supporting student engagement	'Learning from the Sharp End': Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium
15	Framing the future: The impact of our minds on how we work	'Learning from the Sharp End': Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium
16	Learn Act Engage Create: a four-step approach to embedding sustainability into the student experience	'Learning from the Sharp End': Implications for sustainability in Higher Education. International symposium
17	HE and the Sustainable Development Goals	The Institute of Commonwealth Studies
18	The role of the universities and their students in Bristol Green Capital	University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

To find additional information on the papers above, or to browse more examples of the research happening at the universities, visit the research repository pages using the links below, or get in touch using the contact details at the end of this document.

UWE Research Repository

University of Bristol Research Repository

GREEN CAPITAL STUDENT CAPITAL

2015

The year in numbers



worked with local communities, using HEFCE Catalyst funding, to put students at the heart of Bristol's European Green Capital 2015 year, encouraging and facilitating engagement in a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular placement and volunteering activities.

Over **100,000** hours
of student engagement in the city region

PLACEMENTS

VOLUNTEERING

PROJECTS

96% of students felt that:

Their involvement had a positive impact
They had an enjoyable experience
Their activity was worthwhile
They had been useful



economic contribution
of £1,000,000+

2,250

students gave significant
time and effort to
addressing issues of
sustainability during Green
Capital

2
international
conferences

partnering with over
200
 local organisations

From conservation....



...to creating local business plans

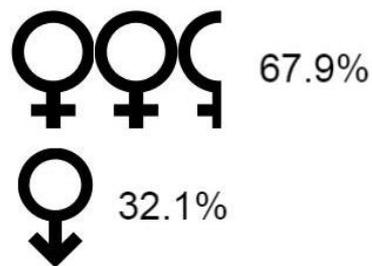


The bike pop-up project gave me confidence to go for it, a chance to experiment and see what sells. It gave me the belief to move to Bristol; I now sell three times as many bikes!

Students have been really valuable, and worked so hard. They added a vibrancy to what we're doing in the woodland; the problem was stopping them, not starting them!



STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



The Future: Aspirations and lessons

Student Capital in summary

The Student Capital set out to increase student sustainability engagement during Bristol's European Green Capital year and into the future. The project involved a novel partnership between two universities – the University of the West of England, Bristol, and the University of Bristol. The project had three ambitious aims: to make a difference to the universities and the city through a significant increase in sustainability engagement, to tell the wider community about the project and engage them with stories of the students' activities, and to understand the experience for both the students and the organisations that were involved, to provide valuable insight and lessons for future projects.

The Student Capital project has been a resounding success, completing all of its objectives and exceeding the targets set. It is the students that can take credit for this. Across the Bristol's Green Capital year over 7,000 students got engaged with sustainability in some way. Students gave 109,730 hours of their time to sustainability engagement during 2015, which equates to 64.5 years' worth of work and a contribution of £1,051,736 to the region's green economy. This is a fantastic achievement and one which demonstrates the power of the student community as a force for positive action, and the role of HEIs as valuable partners in seeking to increase sustainability engagement.

The evaluation of the project demonstrated that it was a positive experience for students themselves, and for the partner organisations that hosted students.

The Student Capital has therefore had some very positive outcomes, however the project was not without its challenges, some of which have been explained in this report. One of the aims of the Student Capital has been to have a strong legacy, and an element of this is to pass on the knowledge and experiences gained over Bristol's Green Capital year to other cities and institutions who are also interested in mobilising the student community for sustainability action. To assist with this, a number of important messages from the project have been distilled from the experience, and are presented below as a set of guiding principles for future iterations of projects of this type.



Key messages and advice

Below are the five key messages from the Student Capital project. These are the lessons that the city will reflect upon and follow as it embarks on the next stages of our sustainability journey, and we hope that these can be useful to other cities seeking to create a better future for themselves.

1. Working together is essential

Teamwork is paramount – so much more can be achieved collectively than in isolation. In the case of the Student Capital the two universities and the two unions worked closely together, however this message is intended in a much broader sense to encompass all partners in the process of student engagement – from the HEIs through the external organisations and local authorities, to the students themselves. The HEIs must seek to create partnerships with a large network of external organisations, and to engage as much of the student community as possible. Local councils and authorities can see HEIs as a valuable partner in delivering change for sustainably.

2. Be willing to take risks

Some things will work and some things won't. The overall success of the project should be measured at the higher levels, not by the occasional missed opportunity or unsuccessful approach. By following this rule, you can create a structure in which risk taking is possible, and the project will benefit. Through our process of trying things out, making some mistakes, and learning from the successes and the failures we can now offer the integration of our knowledge to improve the outcomes of the ongoing project, and share those lessons with you – for example through this Bristol Method document, and through other products of the Student Capital such as Skills Bridge.

3. Funding should be made available

Having sufficient support for a student engagement project is critical. The institution has a central role to play in facilitating, promoting, and maintaining engagement through the opportunities it creates via its links to external organisations, and in supporting students that are engaging. Providing such support in an effective ongoing way requires staff time and institutional resources. The ultimate aim is to maintain a funded student engagement programme at the institutional level, with ongoing funding provided by the institution. If implemented well, student engagement projects should provide a fantastic return on investment in terms of the contribution to the sustainability objectives of the institution, the enhancement of the student experience, and the strengthening of links between the institution and the city.

4. Sustainability engagement must be highly visible

Opportunities must be visible; action must be visible; benefits must be visible. Both inside the HEI and outside in the city, sustainability engagement should be given a high profile. Making it highly visible is a virtuous circle: if students are able to easily see opportunities and also witness other students taking part, they will be more likely to engage themselves; this creates higher levels of engagement which in turn is visible in the institution and the city and encourages more organisations and individuals to get involved, and so forth.

5. Ongoing engagement is crucial to a successful legacy

Bristol's Green Capital 2015 year provided a fantastic opportunity to showcase the city's sustainability credentials, and to act as a catalyst for sustainability action. At the same time there were fears that the year could simply end up as a stylish showcase which created little lasting change. There has been a need therefore to ensure that the positive outcomes of the Green Capital are maintained into the future. To achieve this, right from the outset the Student Capital project was designed with its legacy in mind. Whilst being a project scheduled to last for the Green Capital year, the intention has always been that its outcomes – the increase in student engagement, the new partnerships, the increased visibility of sustainability – should all continue on after the project official came to a close. By designing the legacy as a core element, it has been possible to maximise the benefits of the project and its funding.

6. Change is possible

The Student Capital is testament to the success of the European Green Capital 2015 year, and demonstrates the value of HE and the student community as a real force for sustainability action. Bristol's sustainability journey has not been easy, nor is it complete; there are many obstacles to be overcome in our efforts to make positive differences, and at times it can be very difficult. But the effort and passion of the students in the Green Capital year have shown that change is possible, and the big message of the Student Capital is that through working together and persisting we can have a very positive impact upon our environment and our communities.

We'd love to hear about your experiences of student sustainability engagement, and discuss new ways of getting people involved.

To get in touch, please use the contact details on the following pages.

Good luck from the Student Capital team!



BRISTOL 2015

European Green Capital is a prestigious annual award designed to promote and reward the efforts of cities to improve the environment. Bristol is the first ever UK city to win the award.

European Green Capital is run by The European Commission, recognising that Europe's urban societies face many environmental challenges – and that sustainable, low-carbon living is vital to the future of our cities and our people.

The award was first won by Stockholm in 2010. Since then, Hamburg, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Nantes, Copenhagen, and Bristol have carried the torch. Ljubljana is the European Green Capital for 2016, and they will hand over to Essen at the end of the year.

THE BRISTOL METHOD

The Bristol Method is a knowledge-transfer programme aimed at helping people in other cities understand and apply the lessons that Bristol has learned in becoming a more sustainable city, not just in 2015 but in the last decade.

Each module of the Bristol Method is presented as an easy-to-digest 'how to' guide on a particular topic, which use Bristol's experiences as a case study. The modules contain generic advice and recommendations that each reader can tailor to their own circumstances.

The Bristol Method modules are published on the Bristol 2015 website at www.bristol2015.co.uk/method

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More information on the Student Capital project can be found in the full project report, available from:
eprints.uwe.ac.uk/28311



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