

# The Public Sector Sustainability Awards

## Most Sustainable Public Sector Organisation in Education

Plymouth University has an outstanding reputation for sustainability. Ranked the number one green university in the UK in 2010 by People and Planet (4<sup>th</sup> in 2011, 2nd in 2012) and winner of a Green Gown Award for Institutional Change and Continuous Improvement in 2011, it has been recognised for the innovative way that it approaches sustainability in its day-to-day operations, its teaching and research, and its engagement and partnership with local and regional communities.

Plymouth has embedded the principles of sustainability at the core of its operations, and has designated it a 'Super KPI'. At the same time, the University is also a catalyst for change, partnering with a wide range of organisations to promote sustainability and best practice.

And the University is setting new standards in accountability, making public its performance and inviting a panel of external stakeholders to review what it is doing, comment on its policies and systems, and challenge the institution on how it can do better in future.

The University's management structure enables it to focus upon three key aspects of sustainability.

### 1. Teaching and learning as overseen by the **Centre for Sustainable Futures (CSF)**

The CSF is **responsible for leading and supporting sustainability education in the curriculum at Plymouth**, as well as working with colleagues across the institution, and in the wider sector, on educational research. It encourages all areas of the University to consider how they can embed sustainability within their curricula and utilise the learning and research opportunities provided by the campus and community.

### 2. Research through the **Institute of Sustainability Solutions Research (ISSR)**

The ISSR aims to be an effective hub for researchers **offering practical, tailor-made support to the University's Research Centres, groups and individuals**: from providing help in locating sources of funding; building partnerships with industry, government, civil society and other organisations, or facilitating interdisciplinary research and collaboration. The ISSR boasts a network of over 200 active researchers drawn from across the institution, with an interest in sustainability. It plays a crucial role in communicating sustainability research activities to clients and other stakeholders, and is the first such solutions-focused institute of its kind in the university sector.

### 3. Operations by the **Office of Procurement and Sustainability (OPS)**

OPS is **embedding a co-ordinated and systematic approach to managing and reporting on sustainability** activity across University operations, including procurement, space and asset utilisation, capital builds and environmental impacts through energy and water consumption, waste, biodiversity and travel.

Representatives from all three areas, along with student representatives, sit together on a Sustainability Executive Group. The strategies they create are published, along with other key information on the website ([www.plymouth.ac.uk/sustainability](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/sustainability)).

## Partnership and Engagement

- On a national level, Plymouth is a founder member of the BIS-sponsored **Social Enterprise University Enterprise Network**, in which it works with the private, public and voluntary sectors to nurture social enterprises and disseminate best practice and policy advice.
- Its **Community Research Awards** provide academic support and funding (£200,000 over four years) to charity and voluntary organisation projects – from supporting dementia sufferers and those with spinal injuries, to the recruitment and retention of volunteers. And the annual **Vice-Chancellor's Enterprise Awards** have also provided public recognition of a number of businesses and employees who have championed sustainability in their course of their operations or voluntary work.

- The University records all of its volunteering activities – last year, over 876 volunteers gave 11,500 hours of their time on a variety of projects
- The University of Plymouth Students Union (UPSU) demonstrates strong support for environmental and ethical issues and works in partnership with the University. It achieved a Gold standard in the most recent **Green Impact Students Union Accreditation Award** – after two consecutive Silver accolades. It has also introduced Green Choice information labels on food and merchandise; a Green Bottle campaign to encourage the use of sustainable bottles; and a Green Week survey to drive engagement with the student body.

### **Estates and Operations.**

- The University has reduced its carbon emissions since 2007/08 by nearly 2,000 tonnes per annum; reduced water consumption from 11m<sup>3</sup> per student to 4.5m<sup>3</sup>/student (with cumulative savings over a 20-year period equal to £3.4m); and now recycles 55% of its total waste.
- **Environmental initiatives** include switching to efficient **LED lighting** across the campus; **installing inverter controls** to intelligently manage the ventilation and heating systems of the buildings on campus; designed **improved building management systems**, with weather compensated control and optimum start/stop decision-making around the core hours; signing up to the **Short Time Operational Reduction programme**, to enable the city to address power generation issues. Under the scheme, a third party organisation is able to remotely shut down areas of the campus plant at short notice.
- The University has been awarded a £1 million Revolving Green Fund grant from HEFCE to develop the **world's first integrated IT and building energy management system**.
- The University uses its estate and resources as a teaching and learning tool, and support and technical staff provide **guest lectures** to students and external partners
- The accreditation to **ISO14001 and BS8900:2006** has further helped to raise awareness in utilities, waste disposal/recycling, and transport. It is already integrating with appropriate courses so that students receive training in the operation of Environmental Management Systems.
- The University locally sources 30% of its procured goods, and is a partner in the award-winning **Sell2Plymouth programme**, which has now registered 2,891 local suppliers, and awarded £2.5m worth of contracts.
- In the most recent Universities that Count assessment, Plymouth increased its overall score to 85.9%, significantly higher than the sector average of 75%. It achieved outstanding achievement scores of over 90% in Climate Change, Water Consumption, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Members of the University are also working on a number of Key Advisory Groups to support the development of the new EAUC-sponsored Learning in Future Environments (LiFE) programme.
- The University has been re-accredited with **Fairtrade status**, and has been closely involved in developing the Plymouth Food Charter and reflecting this in its own **Sustainable Food Policy**. There are now regular food and craft markets on campus and a weekly farmer's market stall, as well as increased awareness of fair-trade initiatives. The University also runs an allotment as part of its sustainable food activities.
- The University has launched a new **Sustainable Travel Policy**, which partners with local companies to provide subsidized public transport
- The University was awarded a **Green Tourism Business scheme Gold certificate** for the sustainable way in which it manages its conference, exhibition and meeting facilities

## Teaching and Research

Through teaching and research, the University is seeking to produce sustainability-literate graduates, and solutions focused upon some of the grand challenges facing the world.

- The University's sustainability-rich courses are now listed on the University website and CSF is developing a **sustainability badge** to enable students to find courses with a strong sustainability focus.
- The CSF has also been working with students to create a **new interactive student handbook**, which contains information on food, energy, accommodation and transport – and how students can become involved with sustainability-related initiatives at the University. And in conjunction with the University's Environment Manager, it has been liaising with Carbon Visuals over the creation of striking imagery that communicates issues around carbon footprint.
- The CSF also plays an important ambassadorial role for the University when it comes to **disseminating best practice and sharing institutional intelligence** across the higher education sector. For example, it has been working with the Higher Education Academy, on a 'how to' guide entitled *The Future Fit Framework: An Introductory Guide to Teaching and Learning for Sustainability in HE*. It has also led the publication of *The Sustainable University: Exploring Principles and Practice*, in which 18 international institutions were brought together to take forward critical thinking with regard to engagement in sustainability.
- UNESCO invited Vice-Chancellor Professor Wendy Purcell to provide a keynote address on sustainability to an international audience at their HQ in Paris.
- Through the ISSR, a new company called South West Smart Applications Ltd has been created, which is **hosting the technology behind the smart ticketing infrastructure** being used by transport operators and local authorities to create an 'Oyster card' for the region.
- ISSR engages stakeholders through *New Horizons*, a series of reports aimed at practitioners in the sector, covering topics such as sustainable transport, health, and waste.
- The ISSR **delivered the externally-funded Low Carbon Framework**. Commissioned by Plymouth City Council and funded by the Department for Energy and Climate Change, the framework assessed the size and value of Plymouth's low carbon economy, forecasted its potential growth to 2020, and related it to the skills needed in the city and the potential for jobs. It is also leading a £1.8m pound 'eViz' project to develop strategies to help visualize and communicate to people how energy is used in properties, to help reduce wastage and bills.
- The University's new **£19m Marine Building**, with its unmatched wave tank testing facilities, is set to be at the heart of the South West Marine Energy Park, which is working to support renewable and green energy technologies.