

Green Capital: Student Capital Student-led Evaluation

**An evaluation report prepared for the University of
the West of England, the University of Bristol, the
Students' Union at UWE, and Bristol Students'
Union**

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Overview

"The Green Capital: Student Capital project has aimed to [put] 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."

Green Capital: Student Capital Report January 2016

1.0 Introduction

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1.1 Overview

To assess and evaluate the impact of the Green Capital: Student Capital project, the partnership (the University of the West of England, the University of Bristol, the Students' Union at UWE, and Bristol Students' Union) worked with NUS to train a team of students from both universities to lead an evaluation process. There were two key aims for the evaluation:

- To verify the quantitative outputs of the Green Capital: Student Capital project;
- And to make a qualitative assessment of the outcomes of the project.

As is keeping with the spirit of the Green Capital: Student Capital project, this evaluation was entirely student-led. The partnership has entrusted the evaluation of their project to those who may be their harshest critics but also those who stood to benefit the most from the project's impact.

1.2 Process

Following intensive student training, the evaluation was comprised of two key phases. The first was a documentary evidence review and the second was a series of group interviews.

1.2.1 Student Training

The partnership briefed the student evaluators on the key elements Green Capital: Student Capital project and NUS led training on evaluation and auditing, based on the auditing procedure typically used by NUS for other

behaviour change and engagement programmes.

1.2.1 Documentary Evidence Review

The student evaluators reviewed a range of documents and verified that the actions set out in the bid documents were fulfilled. This included the original bid, the Bristol Method Student Capital module, the interim reports to HEFCE, and other project reports.

1.2.2 Interviews

To flesh out their understanding and make a qualitative assessment of the outcomes of the project, student evaluators conducted a series of group interviews with key individuals. These informed the audit process as well as providing insights which have contributed to this report and the broader research conducted on the programme.

The interviews included:

- Fiona Hyland (UoB) and Jenny Idle (UWE)
- Hannah Tweddell (Bristol SU), Amy Walsh (Bristol SU), and Billy Clayton (UWE)
- James Longhurst (UWE) and Chris Willmore (UoB)
- Rachel Colley (UWE SU)

These groups were intentionally designed to be made up of representatives from across both universities/students' unions to ensure the evaluation reflected the collaborative, partnership working demonstrated throughout the project.

Evaluation

"The most impactful part of the Green Capital, Student Capital project was the sheer number of students which have actively participated in activities, on such a wide and varied scale, be it volunteering, placements etc. - and how these activities overall enhance the student experience."

Student Evaluator, June 2016

2.0 Evaluation

2.1 Evaluation overview

The evaluation of the Green Capital: Student Capital project is captured through two key sections – the verification of outputs and a qualitative assessment of outcomes.

2.2 Key Findings

Student evaluators were able to verify that all project outputs had been achieved and that significant positive outcomes had resulted from the project’s engagement with students and the wider community. The evaluators reflected on:

- The strong collaborative working which had achieved,
- Levels of engagement achieved which far exceeded the outlined targets,
- A genuine focus on legacy and long term impact,
- And a dedication to ensuring the *meaningfulness* of the project.

“I was really impressed with the way the two universities worked together, and the way each university worked with their SU [...] it very much felt like one team working towards a common goal.”

Student Evaluator, June 2016

2.3 Project Outputs

Target outputs of the Green Capital: Student Capital project capture the key performance indicators described within the bid documents. These have been summarised below in the form of 10 criteria beside which the evaluators determined if the partnership had been compliant and provided further comments and feedback.

ID	Criteria	Why are we asking? What sort of thing are we looking for?	Compliant?	Evaluator Comment
Increase in student engagement in business, community and voluntary sector organisations				
SC-01	100,000 hours of student engagement in Green Capital activity (equivalent to 8,500 per month) achieved by the end of the HEFCE funding period.	Students at the universities have been engaging in a whole range of activities with a sustainability focus - be this environmental, social, cultural, or economic sustainability. For Student Capital, the aim has been to promote and expand this engagement, and so the project has a target of	Y	This has been over-achieved - currently standing at 109,730 hours, equivalent to 64.5 years of activity, producing over £1 million worth of economic benefit. Hours were tracked through students’ self-reporting meaning that actual totals are likely much higher.

		<p>recording 100,000 hours of sustainability engagement over the 14/15 and 15/16 academic years (to account for the fact that the Green Capital cut across two academic years). Student engagement included in the definition was volunteering, placements, internships, and project work.</p>		<p>Hopefully this data will continue to be tracked through the ongoing support for the Change Makers awards within both universities because being able to articulate the strong economic and social benefit of students to Bristol is incredibly important.</p>
SC-02a	<p>One cohort of “Green Capital Change Makers” with participation certified via their HEI from January to June 2015.</p>	<p>The aim of Student Capital is to promote and celebrate students’ effort and passion for sustainability engagement. To do so, the Green Capital Change Maker award was created. To become a Change Maker, students had to complete 7.5 hours of sustainability engagement, and share their experience in some way (for example through social media, a</p>	Y	<p>This has been achieved. As of certification in June 2015 - 92 students gained “Green Capital Change Makers” certificates, 20 of which were gold.</p>

<p>SC-02b</p>	<p>One cohort of “Green Capital Change Makers” with participation certified via their HEI from September to December 2015.</p>	<p>blog, etc.). To recognise students that had displayed exceptional levels of commitment, a higher level Gold Change Maker award was presented to those students achieving 25 hours or more of engagements, and sharing their experience.</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>This has been achieved and the ceremony for Sept-Dec Change Makers, which occurred in February 2016, was part of a wider Green Capital event in order to "maximise the visibility of the Change Maker awards and firmly link them to the ongoing legacy of Green Capital".</p> <p>To continue widening the reach of this scheme, evaluators suggest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased communications to students on relevant courses, • Ensuring students understand definition of sustainability as including social and economic aspects (not just environmental), • Clarifying that activities which are not associated to their university and SU are still eligible.
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<p>SC-03</p>	<p>Five projects brokered with external partners as a part of Student Capital.</p>	<p>To encourage higher levels of student sustainability engagement, it is essential to form partnerships with a wide range of external organisations across the city and beyond. A critical aspect of this is to take a proactive approach to the commissioning and undertaking of new sustainability projects and partnerships, and Student Capital aims to work with as many external partners as possible to create opportunities for students to get involved.</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>This has been over-achieved with 10 projects having been brokered. External partners have been used within the projects, such as UWE GreenSpace with multiple partner organisations. Quality student opportunities have clearly been shown as a result. There are some projects already existed prior to Green Capital and there is some overlap with Skills Bridge.</p> <p>Many external partners were not necessarily new partners coming forward through partnership schemes of Green Capital but were building on existing networks.</p>
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<p>SC-04</p>	<p>600 students engaged with 180 organisations hosting a student project</p>	<p>Objectives SC-01-SC-03 explain the importance of engaging both students and external partners in the project. However, to create lasting change it is not sufficient only to encourage a large amount of activity, but also necessary to encourage broad participation to make sustainability engagement a cultural norm within the universities. Therefore it is essential to have ambitious targets for the numbers of students and external organisations engaged, to lay a firm foundation upon which to build in the years to come.</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>Again, this objective has been massively exceeded with 7537 students having engaged with 205 organisations.</p> <p>It is worth noting that the number of organisations actually contacted was 2014 however, of that, just 205 engaged with the programme so although the target was more than met there is learning around how to better engage the organisation and articulate the value of students.</p> <p>The Skills Bridge brokering service will continue to easily link hosts to students though it should be recognised that staff resource is required to ensure the further development of this component of the project.</p> <p>In future, further demographic questions should be asked of students taking part in the project such as ethnicity and disability to ensure total accessibility.</p> <p>It was observed that two thirds of participants were female. However, this trend is normal across most sustainability and/or volunteering schemes. Achieving equal engagement from both male and female students continues to be a sector-wide challenge and is not unique to this project.</p>
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Dissemination activities to examine the role of HE in Green Capital initiatives, aimed at ensuring wider impacts				
SC-05	Minimum of 150 delegates taking part in two international conferences /events.	Dissemination is important for increasing the impact of the Student Capital project. The Green Capital year makes Bristol a leading international city for sustainability best-practice, and conferences bring together people with a huge range of skills and expertise to help address the sustainability issues we face.	Y	<p>Three conferences were hosted/presented at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference 1: Learning from the Sharp End: implications for sustainability in Higher Education (7th-8th Sept 2015) Debates in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals and the aim of agreeing 6 SDGs for the next 10 years. • Conference 2: EUROCITIES Environmental Forum meeting and Covenants of Mayors workshop (7th-9th Oct 2015). • Conference 3: Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC) 2016 conference. Student capital team hosted a plenary panel sharing reflections and disseminated widely to universities nationally and internationally. Between the first two conferences, 285 delegates were engaged.
SC-06	Four papers generated and published in peer reviewed journals by end 2016.	Similarly to conferences, peer-reviewed journal papers are an important method of dissemination for sharing knowledge and stimulating debate around the role of Higher Education in supporting student sustainability engagement, and demonstrating the successes and lessons from the Student Capital project.	Y	This has been achieved, demonstrated that there was significant academic output achieved with 16 papers having been published.

<p>SC-07</p>	<p>Six video case studies disseminated via Sustainability Challenge Shop (September 2015).</p>	<p>Successful dissemination relies on using a range of media to communicate with different stakeholders - academic, professional, public. Conferences and journal papers cater mainly to academic and professional audiences, and yet sustainability engagement is something for which public support and engagement is crucial. Video case studies have been developed to provide information in a more engaging and less technical format for audiences that might not normally engage with - nor have access to - more academic forms of communication. It should be noted here that since the beginning of the project the Sustainability Challenge Shop has evolved into the Skills Bridge online platform, and that its objectives and format are now significantly different than at the outset of the project.</p>	<p>Work in progress</p>	<p>At present, four video case studies have been produced to date though more are expected to be hosted on the Skills Bridge website shortly.</p>
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SC-08	Archive of material in online repositories for Green Capital Student Capital, benefitting universities in other Green Capital cities, organisations and potential student volunteers available by the end of the project.	A core part of the Student Capital project is its legacy. The online repositories serve as a store for all of the insights and lessons developed in the project, and the aim is that by being freely-available online these are easily accessible to anyone with an interest in sustainability engagement.	Y	This has been achieved. There are Student Capital web pages for both Universities, as well as research repositories. However, the research repositories are not specific to Green Capital Student Capital, although relevant papers can be searched for. The websites provide case studies for different projects during 2015. There is some information if one is willing to look for it, but a more comprehensive resource may be needed for a university in a future Green Capital city. It is currently sufficient for someone with an interest in sustainability engagement.
SC-09	Two evidence reports submitted to HEFCE and sector agencies where the learning from Green Capital can help shape future HE engagement in comparable activities 1, interim report (January 2016) and a final report (June 2016).	The Evidence Reports provide the substantive record of the activities and achievements of the Student Capital project, and demonstrate its success against the objectives set out at the beginning of the project. To-date, the Interim Evidence Report has been completed, which outlines progress towards the project objectives up to the end of 2015.	Y	The January 2016 interim report was submitted and June 2016 is coming. The interim report clearly demonstrates early signs of significant positive outcomes through case studies/examples.
Evaluation of activity				
SC-10a	Robust external evaluation(s) conducted which shows 80% of students have contributed meaningfully to the	The main objective of the Student Capital project is to encourage, support, and facilitate greater levels of student sustainability engagement. The issue	Y	This has been achieved and is discussed below in project outcomes.

	project and Bristol Green Capital.	of quality is equally as important as quantity however. As-such, it is not sufficient for the project to simply be an exercise in generating numbers to fulfil a quota for engagement, rather it is essential that the engagement opportunities be valuable and meaningful both in a practical sense in terms of contributing to addressing issues of sustainability, and to the students and the organisations that are hosting them. Student Change Makers and external partners have been provided with an opportunity to provide feedback on their engagement assessed against a number of different aspects of the experience.		
SC-10b	Robust external evaluation(s) conducted which shows 80% of external organisations have contributed meaningfully to the project and Bristol Green Capital.		Y	This has been achieved and is discussed below in project outcomes.

2.4 Project Outcomes

As has been demonstrated by the achievement of the performance indicators discussed above, the successes across the whole of the Green Capital: Student Capital project have been significant.

2.4.1 Overall Project

On the **project as a whole** the student evaluators felt that the most impactful and meaningful components came down to the “huge numbers achieved in terms of student hours of volunteering, the 200 organisations reached and the establishment of better links between the universities and Bristol communities and organisations.” They recognised the achievement in bringing together so many different groups, reflecting that “seeing such a diverse group working together and hearing the positive feedback they all gave made 2015 feel very inspiring. It was clear all of them viewed this year as a cultural shift towards attitudes towards sustainability in Bristol.”

The comments and feedback provided by community partners further reinforced the positive impact of the students who worked with them. One student evaluator said that what surprised them most through the evaluation was “the overwhelmingly positive feedback from both students *and* external community partners. It was really pleasing to see how useful the students felt, and how much community partners valued their impact and would recommend working with Bristol students to other organisations.”

2.4.2 Meaningful Student Engagement

Of course, the most important aim of the Green Capital: Student Capital project is to be able to demonstrate **meaningful impact to students**.

Through feedback surveys and qualitative reflection it was clear that students had been offered a new and diverse range of opportunities not typically afforded to them and that these had offered useful skills development.

The strategic and thoughtful approach to student engagement was clearly demonstrated through the documentary evidence and strongly reinforced through

the interviews. Using action learning, learning-by-doing, and engaged learning methodology and pedagogy it was ensured that all students had valuable, high-quality learning experiences. As one interviewee put it – Skills Bridge is about creating opportunities for students which go well beyond the idea of student volunteers as stewards at events and instead see students as individuals with the knowledge and skills to make a real positive impact in their communities.

“I feel students have benefited from the Green Capital, Student Capital project because it gives them a new perspective on sustainability - many reported feeling inspired to do more volunteering, incorporate sustainability into their everyday lives, or pursue a career in sustainability. It also provides them with employability skills in a unique way, especially those that start their own projects or are able to work with external partners through their university course. I also think that by embedding sustainability into every course (as the two universities aim to do) means students will carry sustainable principles with them no matter what sector they go on to work in.”

Student evaluator, June 2016

As a result of the success of these types of student engagement strategies, both universities have moved to embed sustainability engaged learning across more of their courses. The University of Bristol has just introduced the “Engaged University Strategy” which aims to incorporate these principles within every student’s experience.

The links to course-based volunteering opportunity have also demonstrated good practice for engaging with students who have high contact hours and for whom “traditional” extra-curricular volunteering is not a good fit.

As a result of this and other factors, both students’ unions reflected on the fact that Green Capital: Student Capital, as well as their wider sustainability work, allowed them to engage with groups of students that the students’ unions were otherwise not good at engaging. For example, mature students, post graduate students, and international students are typically harder-to-reach groups for SUs and yet had higher levels of engagement than other segments of the student population.

On demographics, there is further analysis that can be done (especially around ethnicity and disability), however one clear trend was a higher level of engagement from female students than from male students. As mentioned earlier on, this is not unique to this project and is a common challenge across sustainability and volunteering programmes. This is likely a reflection of wider society in which women are typically expected to do more unpaid labour. Engaging more effectively with high-contact-hours courses, which are typically more male-dominated, will likely help this as well as ensuring that a wide range of events are offered to cater to all different types of students.

Students felt that their experiences were made most meaningful by gaining real-world skills and having the opportunity to use them for the benefit of their community. The evaluators reflected their own appreciation for “the effective networking opportunities and opportunities to share academic and on the ground experiences of sustainability within the city e.g. links with BGCP.”

Through this experience, students changed the way they saw themselves in their community, reflecting that “at Green Mingles, students are treated with respect and are welcomed in to the sustainability field” and that “students really do have a loud voice and make up a significant proportion of Bristol’s community.”

One interviewee captured the question of meaningfulness of student engagement perfectly in that **“for a student’s experience in the project to have been meaningful, it does not need to be transformational. Rather, a single experience becomes part of a longer journey that is over the whole university experience transformational.”**

The result of the HEFCE Catalyst Funding has meant not only accounting for the amount of student engagement but also creating a wealth of new opportunities for students and developing a much deeper understanding of the impact such experiences have on students and on the wider community.

2.4.3 The Change Makers Award

The Change Makers award is a brilliant method for capturing data on student volunteering whilst also providing formal recognition for students’ contributions. On reflecting on their own Change Maker award, one evaluator said, “[students] will be able to put on their CVs that they have been awarded ‘Change Maker’ accreditation and may have made useful links in terms of future career prospects. It will have improved confidence, given additional skills, broadened their contacts and **increased a sense of worth and wellbeing amongst students. They will also feel more a part of the city in which they live and have a sense of belonging and an appreciation for the citizens of Bristol.**”

The ongoing tracking of student engagement through the Change Makers award will provide a useful record to the types of students getting involved, the projects they do, and what they gain from these experiences year-on-year. Tracking student development during their degree and after graduation through this scheme has real potential to prove the value of student engagement over the long term.

2.4.4 Skills Bridge

The Skills Bridge website, though still in its infancy, is an integral part of the legacy of the Green Capital: Student Capital project. The path for Skills Bridge seemed very clear to some of the individuals interviewed and yet quite uncertain to others. As so much of the legacy of the project hinges on this particular component, it is integral develop a plan to ensure its ongoing development.

The key recommendations by the student evaluators are to ensure that there is sufficient support for Skills Bridge behind the scenes – at present 0.1 FTE is dedicated and this seems limited for this critical stage in its development. As well, when it is fully launched, a wide communications plan will be required to ensure it reaches the target audiences. Some interviewees raised concerns about potential duplication from existing platforms and so, though it is serving a unique purpose, this needs to be clearly communicated.

A strong ongoing commitment to resourcing, marketing, and building Skills Bridge will ensure it can achieve the expectations set out for it.

2.4.3 Partnership Working

An absolutely integral factor to this project's success was the partnership established between both universities and both students' unions as well as how effectively this group engaged with the Green Capital Partnership itself. The student evaluators reflected heavily upon this, saying they were "really impressed with the way the two universities worked together, and the way each university worked with their SU. [...] **it very much felt like one team working towards a common goal.**"

The universities were able to overcome the typical challenges of competition and rivalry and let the bigger-picture vision dictate their aims. Of course some challenges arise when working across two major institutions, but to the evaluators they said "if we didn't know the job roles of everyone, you wouldn't guess which of the four organisations they belonged to." This is a real testament to the degree to which all individuals were genuinely united in ensuring this project's success. Furthermore, the partnership was able to acknowledge the different strengths of the two universities and use this to their advantage.

To guarantee the continued success of this partnership, various individuals reflected on the importance of moving away from personality-led collaborative working to embedding this partnership working across various members of staff and departments within both institutions and students' unions. Although no formal agreement was in place between the universities for this project, it may be advisable to create an agreement to set out how the universities and students' unions can maintain this strong partnership working in the future.

2.4.4 Dissemination

The reach of the Green Capital: Student Capital project has been immense and the learning will undoubtedly influence future Green Capitals as well as the way in which universities across the UK engage with their cities on sustainability. The Bristol Method, along with the other published papers and conference presentations, serve to share the lessons from Bristol with the widest possible community.

The evaluators reflected that this global reach and world-wide demand to learn from Bristol simply further evidences the extent to which the past year has had a positive impact. It was also clear that the HEFCE Catalyst Funding enabled the partnership to raise the profile of their work that much more.

2.4.5 Legacy

The ongoing theme for Green Capital is “It Doesn’t Stop Here” and the importance of having a strong legacy was reflected throughout the Green Capital: Student Capital project. In many cases, the new activities introduced through the project have been absorbed into the universities’ and students’ unions’ normal suite of activities. However, on a larger scale, there has been a marked step change in how the universities and students’ unions work together, with the city, for the future. The working relationship which has been fostered, the students who have engaged heavily in the project (and will continue to do so), and the sharing of learning will be the greatest legacy of the programme.



The challenge across all of Bristol in the years following Green Capital will, of course, be determining what can continue and what cannot following the end of funding/support. However, it is clear the universities and students’ unions are deeply committed to this agenda and have used the Student Capital project as a vehicle to prove the value of this type of engagement activity, allowing them to secure longer-term funding.

The student evaluators, when considering legacy, said: “I think it should continue along this path of partnership, especially with institutions and the ability for communities to see that students do provide a benefit to so many different areas of interest within the community. In terms of engagement - I simply do not want to see a massive drop off, proving that this event was simply a onetime thing - or as “a flash in the pan”. It is very important to maintain the enthusiasm which has clearly been shown by students in future sustainability engagements.”

Another evaluator recommended to “use results of this year to set realistic targets for future years and retain enough funding to continue the most successful projects. Use this year’s learnings to not only maintain but increase student engagement and student impact.” This, they went onto say, will allow the partnership to continue to “become a national/global leader as sustainable universities and students’ unions, be a demonstration of the impact students can have on sustainability, produce graduates who carry sustainable principles with them throughout their lives, and demonstrate how two competing universities can work together so successful towards a common goal.”

The continuing development of Skills Bridge and support of the Change Makers awards, as well as the ongoing measuring and tracking of student engagement, will provide tangible legacy to new

activity created through the Student Capital project. The universities will be required to feed into the 10-year plan for the Bristol Green Capital Partnership which will report back on the long-term impacts of the 2015 year. Already, it is evident that the universities and students' unions have significantly developed their student engagement strategies related to sustainability as a result of this project. It is exciting to imagine how much further progress can be made in the next ten years.

2.5 Student Evaluator Experience

Three student evaluators led the evaluation and auditing process for the Green Capital: Student Capital programme, gaining valuable employability, reporting, and sustainability skills as a result. At the close of each day students participating in reflection activities to track their development over the evaluation. At the end, they had this to say about their own experiences:

- "I have understood more about the wide reaching nature of sustainability and the complexity of affecting change when working within large organisations. The universities have a tricky task ahead in terms of embedding sustainability in everything they do but have strong leaders and an enthusiastic team willing to put all their energy into achieving this."
- "I have something to offer in terms of my ability to critically analyse reports and suggest areas for consideration. I have been on many interview panels in the past but have valued the opportunity to interview people at such a strategic level within the university and to practice my interview skills further."
- "[This experience] reinforced how interesting and enjoyable research is, and useful it can be."

2.6 Lead Evaluator Summation

Each distinct component of the Green Capital: Student Capital project has had a positive outcome for students and for the wider community. Not only have the objectives set out for the project all been met but the true meaningfulness of the student engagement has been proven.

The impact of this project will continue to have positive effects on the individual students who have been involved, the working relationship between both universities and both students' unions, the way in which the universities engage with the city and the wider community, and the way in which the universities of future Green Capitals engage with their own communities.

Well done to the partnership team across both universities and students' unions. The evaluators all reflected upon the energy and enthusiasm for the project portrayed by each individual. The level and quality of student engagement over the past year is absolutely incredible and offers an incredible platform upon which to continue to strive towards creating graduates who are ready to tackle the world's greatest sustainability challenges – during their degree and when they graduate.

Lastly, kudos to the team for accepting the challenge of having student evaluators audit this project – it ensured that student leadership and meaningful skills development remained core to the programme throughout the entire process.

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