

# Innovation

## WINNER

### University of Bradford - Bringing environmental teaching close to home

All second year undergraduates in Bradford's Department of Geography and Environmental Science, and on the land and water management courses of the School of Engineering, Design and Technology, now do a compulsory module on practical environmental management. The students work in self-managed teams on environmental issues relevant to the University which are identified by the course tutor, Dr Liz Sharp, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Environmental Science, and Jaime Sullivan, the University Environmental Manager.

Jaime Sullivan believes that "some projects are inevitably stronger than others, but the overall gains for environmental management in the University are considerable. In general, the projects give me unique access to students' perspectives and preferences. Their specific findings are also very helpful. For example, one team did an environmental review of grounds maintenance. This not only gathered very useful data on usage of pesticides and other chemicals, it also highlighted the scope to create more biodiversity into our grounds. As a direct result, we're now implementing a biodiversity action plan." Other particularly successful examples include a benchmarking study of car parking at other universities which helped determine decisions about charging, the number of permits and the number of spaces at Bradford. A course-inspired project to improve cycle provision on campus should also be carried out in 2006.



Liz Sharp

Liz Sharp believes that "it's so much more motivating for students if they feel that the work they are carrying out is real, and that it will be used. Students also learn - in a much more effective way than through theory - vital work skills such as operating in teams, project management, report writing and critical reflection on your own practice." The relevance of these skills is enhanced by the involvement of the University's Careers Development Service, who run sessions to help the students understand their importance to employers, and how to reflect this in their CVs.

Liz Sharp notes that "action learning modules of this kind can be challenging for students used to very structured approaches, and we've certainly had to adapt aspects of it in response to their feedback. But as the module progresses, and subsequently, I know that most students realise that they are learning a lot not only about practical environmental management, but also about themselves."

#### Judges' Comments on Innovation

*As the shortlisted entries show, the Innovation category attracted a wide range of entries. This demonstrates the high degree of creativity within the sector, but also made the category exceptionally difficult to judge.*

*In a very close contest, the University of Bradford's Environmental Management module emerged as the winner. This impressed through its holistic and truly integrated approach to the topic, bringing on board academics, non-academics and students to create both learning benefits for participants, and practical benefits for University environmental management. Whilst group project-focused courses of this kind are not unusual, it has a number of distinctive features such as the fact that it is a compulsory undergraduate module, the use of live University projects, and the involvement of estates and careers staff on a regular basis. The module is challenging for second year students, and has had occasional teething problems, but overall provides an excellent, and very replicable, example of how to integrate sustainability concerns into the curriculum.*