

Waste

WINNER

University of Leeds - Recycling saves money

Replacing 5,000 office waste bins with 2000 recycling bins for paper, plastic, cans and glass is just one reason why the University increased its overall recycling rate from 16% in 2003 to over 26% in 2005, with the next target of achieving 30% by 2010. Other aspects of the initiative include specific recycling schemes for batteries, cardboard, cartridges and toners, chemical bottles, computers, fluorescent tubes, furniture, green waste, mobile phones and wood, and a greater emphasis on purchasing recycled paper and stationery. 32 Environmental Co-ordinators have also been appointed in the main schools and departments to help promote and publicise the waste and other environmental initiatives, and provide advice and assistance. They work with the Environmental Officer to identify and develop programmes to meet the university's environmental targets.

The main focus to date has been on academic and administrative buildings, where recycling rates have risen to 55-70%, compared to around 24% before the initiative. Attention is now shifting to student accommodation, building on a partnership with Leeds City Council to provide more recycling facilities. Recycling rates rose from almost zero to 20% during 2005, and should rise further as the policy of removing waste bins is implemented.

The scheme has had senior management support, with Vice Chancellor Professor Michael Arthur telling staff: "The office waste recycling scheme has already been a great success, but we need everyone to take part if we are going to make a real and permanent difference." Dr. Keith Pitcher, the University's Environmental Officer, also emphasises the importance of communication and feedback. "We always accompany the launch of the scheme in a building with a briefing meeting, which allows us to deal with concerns, and also pick up on really good ideas from staff. Student projects have been very useful in auditing outcomes, and providing information that helps us to improve further."

Getting approval for the scheme required a convincing business case. This was based on calculating the costs of doing nothing - which would result in a 30% increase in waste management costs between 2004 and 2010. The costs of the recycling initiative were estimated at £92,000, with annual cost savings of £47,000 a year when fully operational. Keith Pitcher observes that "this gives a payback of three years. And that's without including the additional benefit of cleaners now spending more of their time on actual cleaning, rather than emptying individual office waste bins."



Recycling in the Vice Chancellor's office, with (left to right) Dr Keith Pitcher, Environmental Officer; Professor Michael Arthur, Vice Chancellor; Professor John Fisher, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, and Chair of Environmental Steering Group; Janet Willis, Cleaning Services Manager.

Judges' Comments on Waste

The Universities of Derby and Leeds show that good waste management, and increased recycling, can both save money, and create environmental benefits.

The University of Leeds has achieved this through a sustained and holistic initiative, combining top level support, based on long term targets, investment in facilities, measurement and auditing to provide good data, and high levels of staff and student involvement. The intelligent implementation of the scheme through communication of stakeholders, provision of information, and the establishing of a support network is especially impressive. So too is the variety of waste streams which have been targeted, and the effective use of partnerships.