

- Higher education colleges have about 8% of the total 2.2 million higher education students in the UK

HIGHLY COMMENDED

York St John University College Students' Union - All quiet for the Pick It Up! Girls

York St John's mission statement commits to education that "embraces difference, challenges prejudice and promotes justice, and is shaped by the College's Church foundation." This has stimulated many actions to achieve the environmental and social objectives of sustainable development, both locally and through the College's international links. Unfortunately, these actions were not sufficient to overcome differences with some local residents, who were very prejudiced about what they perceived to be excessively noisy students.

With encouragement from the College, the Students' Union decided in 2003 to quieten the critics by launching the SSHH! (Silent Students-Happy Homes) campaign. This has 'branded' posters, door hangers, stickers and wall planners featuring 'Zippy', the character whose mouth is a zip in the children's television programme Rainbow. The materials encourage students to "zip it", especially when they leave events at night. Student Union representatives "spot" a sticker each month and award a prize, which encourages many students to display them on their doors or windows.

Jack Woodhams, President of the Students' Union, believes that "the SSHH! campaign has been highly successful, and I've presented to a lot of universities about it. As a result, some other Student Unions have now introduced similar campaigns. We're making something that's very boring for students quite sexy and attractive so that it sticks in their brains."

The success of SSHH! has spawned a follow-up - but much noisier - initiative to tackle campus litter. The Pick It Up! campaign features the Pick It Up! Girls, students (mostly burly men) in pantomime outfits. They appear in humorous posters demanding that students dispose of litter appropriately, with the message reinforced by Pick It Up! logos on bins, and on T-shirts worn by student volunteers. Non-compliance can mean harassment and ridicule as the Girls prowl the campus, armed with megaphones. Jack Woodhams notes that the campaign "is very flexible, as we can change the focus during the year to target particular issues such as chewing gum and cigarette butts. It's such a simple idea, but people really notice it."

Sue Waller, Deputy Director of Facilities and Chair of the University College's Agenda 21 Group, confirms that "the campaigns have created a big drop in the number of complaints we get about noise, and in the amount of litter on campus. This not only creates a nicer environment, it also makes it easier for us to work with local people on our other sustainable development projects."



The Pick It Up! Girls

Judges' Comments on Smaller Institutions (continued)

York St John University College Students' Union is at the opposite end of the spectrum, demonstrating its social responsibility with two locally focused, 'bottom up' initiatives, to combat noise and litter. With tremendous creativity and humour, they have encouraged many students to change their behaviour. As a result they are seen in a better light by the wider community, with consequent benefits to the 'Gown and Town' relationship. The SSHH! campaign has already been replicated at other universities, and more should follow."