

Planning for a Low Carbon Future

City College Coventry



Project Synopsis

Pre-eminent in showing leadership about how education can set the standard for the whole of society. Achieving low carbon readiness and increasing the available pool of sustainability intelligence (21st century skills) is a goal for all not the elite few.

Project Aims

The primary aim of the project is to bring about whole system change at the City College Coventry towards a condition of what we call “low carbon readiness.”

Building a new economic model fit for a sustainable, low carbon world is the most urgent task of our times. The current model isn’t working. Instead of delivering widespread prosperity, our economies are undermining wellbeing in the richest nations and failing those in the poorest. The prevailing system has already led us to the brink of economic collapse and if left unchecked it threatens a climate catastrophe.

“At present most of our higher and further education institutions are still leading the way in advancing the kind of thinking, teaching and research that accelerates un-sustainability’

Arjen Wals, Professor of Social Learning and Sustainable Development,
Wageningen University, 2008

Whilst many FE and HE Institutions in the UK have initiated some form of internal carbon management plan and sustainable development policy, this project was designed to enable City College Coventry to be one of the first major educational providers in the UK to explicitly undertake the organisational learning needed to become “low carbon ready” . We proposed the term “low carbon ready” to mean fit for the purpose of both contributing fully to UK’s transition to a low carbon economy and able to derive maximum benefits from such a process.

Organisational learning in this sense means putting in place the essential “infrastructure” of knowledge, skills, tools and processes across the College’s value chain

The project proposed to take representative parts of the College through a six stage transformational experience that would challenge and catalyse far reaching changes across all parts of the College’s value chain. Momentum was sustained by recruiting an internal champion for the project to work alongside our external advisers and be responsible for driving this initiative at board and senior management level and ultimately throughout all faculties of the College.

Project delivery

The six stages of the journey were:

1. A New Vision for City College Coventry

Obtaining commitment to the proposed change at the highest levels within the College was seen as essential to the success of the project. Enabling the College's Executive Management Team to create and own a new vision for the College that captures this commitment was a key part of this process.

2. Awareness Raising and Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge transfer – from both internal and external specialists to the rest of the College was seen as a core foundations for change, helping to embed a new level of understanding from which a new generation of learning strategies and activities will grow. Two mechanisms for knowledge transfer were planned - face to face briefings and a knowledge and collaboration portal

3. Fitness for purpose workshops

Working with selected departments, these pilot workshops served to identify the specific challenges facing a particular area of the curriculum or other part of the value chain and develop skills-related performance indicators which could be used to measure their fitness for purpose to contribute to and derive value from the low carbon agenda.

4. Self evaluation

As an output from the fitness for purpose workshops the teams will consider the evaluation criteria required and the mechanisms for measurement. Using the proprietary self assessment tool develop by advisers RTAL, each team took responsibility for carrying out a self evaluation and creating a plan of action.

5. Applied learning and innovation workshops

To build on the action plan additional consultancy support through our external partners would be provided to help transform the knowledge transfer process into practical application.

6. Shared best practice, collaboration and growth

Sharing and cascading the experience of the exemplar departments and functions across the College's value chain and across the sector was seen as a cost effective way to inspire new curricula, course and service delivery linked to the low carbon agenda. From an early stage the new generation of social media was seen as a potent tool for sharing and for collaboration and a follow up bid to LSIS produced support for a second project focused on using 21st Century Tools to develop essential 21st Century Skills.

The Vision

External sustainability advisers Roger Talbot and David Harrison worked closely and iteratively with the Executive Management Team and specifically with the Director of Estates to shape a new vision for the College. This is the version finally approved by the College Board:

Sustainable development should meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. City College Coventry of today will therefore continue to embrace sustainable practices and will promote them among our students, staff and customers, thereby contributing to sustainable economies.

Knowledge Transfer

Our external advisers – both acknowledged experts in the field – conducted an intensive and series of interactive, one and two-day, knowledge transfer sessions with the Executive Management Team, with Heads of Faculties, Departments and Support Services, with the School of Construction and with the Employer Services Team. The learning materials used in the course of the programme are available as an open resource upon the Project Website.

Fitness-for Purpose Workshops

The workshops served to allow diverse and representative groups within the College to explore exactly what it meant for them specifically to be “low carbon ready”. Explicitly we asked our colleagues to address the seminal question “do the individuals, teams and whole departments you have responsibility for have the necessary knowledge, skills and systems to enable to help the College deliver simultaneously a combination of social, economic and environmental value?” Put more succinctly, are you and they equipped to do well (for the College) AND do good (for the economy and for society)?

Self Evaluation

To help answer that key question, individuals and teams were able to access a proprietary diagnostic and improvement tool which offers an innovative platform upon which to build a “low carbon ready” strategy for an organisation. Across key dimensions of performance, the tool offers a practical means of assessing where you are on the trajectory to low carbon readiness, understanding your strengths and weaknesses and putting in place a progressive improvement programme to get you fit for purpose.

Innovation workshops

Following the self evaluation process and action planning, our external advisers now worked with key individuals and teams – from Construction, Employer Services and Estates and Buildings - to prioritise the options that had been identified within their proposed improvement plans and suggest how the actions could best be taken forward.

Sharing

The College has embraced enthusiastically the new generation of social media tools – for example Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wordpress and AnyMeeting – to draw the whole of the College and the rest of the sector into an open and ongoing conversation about just what it means to be low carbon ready and how this can be achieved.

Despite the fact that much of the project was happening during a period of very intense change and upheaval within the organisation and indeed the sector, the vast majority of stakeholders fully embraced the opportunities offered by the project and responded positively to them. They were seen as a key part of an ongoing change agenda that had the potential to deliver real long term value and become part of a new learning landscape for further education.

Project Outcomes

The following outcomes and outputs are a direct and positive consequence of the Planning for a Low Carbon Future programme:

- 1) A new corporate, college-wide Sustainability Vision, specifically linking the College’s mission with the development of 21st Century skills and support for a low carbon economy.
- 2) The College’s first Sustainability and Low Carbon Strategy, setting ambitious targets extending to each of curriculum, campus and community and putting the College in a leading position within the Sector. Linked to College-wide action plan to make the College fit for purpose – based on the idea of a “low carbon escalator”. i.e. continuous improvement. Amongst other vital issues the Strategy is intended to ensure that the College’s tendering and subcontracting processes (including catering) fully reflects the College’s commitments on sustainability and the delivery of the low carbon economy as well as integrating sustainability into course validation, quality enhancement and other formal processes
- 3) A Low Carbon Ready Scorecard that embodies far-reaching “self assessment” auditing processes to measure “fitness for purpose” across the value chain.
- 4) The establishment of a College Sustainability Group under the chairmanship of the Director of Estates. To have active oversight of the Sustainability and Low Carbon Strategy and

receive reports from the Social Media group, tasked to promote the growth and application of social media within the college as a positive means of creating a new learning landscape and developing the 21st century skills agenda.

- 5) A Carbon Footprint Analyser that has been developed by Sustainability Adviser Roger Talbot in collaboration with the Director of Estates to provide a standardised method for assessing the College's carbon footprint.
- 6) A template for a staff CPD and induction programme covering key elements of low carbon readiness and sustainability intelligence, with a specific focus on new skills development. Employer Services have made positive use of the template to extend their offer to local business in the form of new courses for their client group. It is hoped and expected that in time this will develop into a sustainability leadership/institutional development programme for local employers and for other colleges
- 7) A Low Carbon Student Handbook, authored with the help of Sustainability Adviser David Harrison, which has been introduced as a key part of the student induction pack and is designed to help new and existing students both relate to the wider agenda and take positive steps to reduce their own and the College's Carbon footprint and more generally contribute to the College's sustainability agenda.
- 8) A full set of published reports covering all key stages of the project which can be accessed via the project website

Sharing of Project Findings

In addition to the publication of all the results of the project on the bespoke "Planning for a Low Carbon Futures" website, the College is making use of its raised profile in this area to extend its participation on relevant local and national bodies to ensure the key lessons of the project are heard as widely as possible.

The linking with the LSIS funded "Social Media in Further Education: 21st Century Tools to develop 21st Century Skills" is a powerful step in ensuring the project's message receives wide spread publicity and in inviting other providers to join the conversation.

