

Business partnership category: winner and runners up

A Nottingham Trent University initiative, selected as this year's winner, allows students to help reduce the carbon footprint of small businesses

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Winner: Nottingham Trent University

Nottingham Business School (NBS), part of Nottingham Trent University, has teamed up with Nottingham Energy Partnership (NEP) to combat climate change. As part of their core curriculum, students act as consultants to local businesses helping them to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve Investor in the Environment accreditation.

The main barriers to small businesses taking on Environmental Management System (EMS) accreditation are usually cost, time and expertise. In a 10-week programme, launched in autumn 2014, 150 final-year students attended weekly seminars and lectures delivered by both NBS tutors and NEP.

The students developed working relationships with the participating businesses and public organisations, including the four clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). In partnership with the businesses, students were able to calculate and put together plans to report and reduce the businesses' environmental impact. Final reports were presented to tutors and businesses in December 2014.

The project has demonstrated the role business schools and students can play in providing practical support in the shift to a low carbon economy, by helping businesses across all sectors work on reducing their environmental impacts and developing niche low carbon products and offers. The involvement of the students filled the gap in skills, funding and time that often prevents businesses from gaining accredited EMS.

The students gained the practical skills, understanding and experience to engage with the low carbon economy in their careers beyond graduation. The top 40 students gained an

employment reference from NEPes, a Queen's Award-winning social enterprise, while 25 organisations were supported towards gaining an accredited EMS.

Companies have commented positively on the professional work of the students, especially their innovative ideas on how to reduce carbon emissions. These range from plans for a carbon-free Christmas in a shopping centre to unusual ways of reducing lift usage and changing behaviour.

Four other local universities are now thinking of using the NTU model.

Runner up: Coventry University

The university developed a partnership with Unipart, a UK-based manufacturer operating in the automotive, oil and gas, aerospace and rail sectors, to address the UK's manufacturing skills shortage and to accelerate the commercialisation of innovation and R&D.

Together the university and Unipart created the Institute for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AME) – the UK's first faculty on the factory floor. The idea is to enable undergraduates to apply theory learned in the classroom to live projects on the Unipart shop floor. The experience that students would normally gain from a placement year in industry is embedded throughout a new three-year BEng course in manufacturing engineering, making graduates immediately more employable.

The first cohort of 23 undergraduates arrived in September 2014. They are developing the skills required by the manufacturing sector, such as project management, lean manufacturing, product verification and costing. Students also learn robotics and automation using production scale robots installed in AME.

For full article see: <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/mar/19/business-partnership-category-winner-and-runners-up>