

Prince's 2009 May Day Summit on Climate Change

Key Note Speech – Professor Steve West

Low Carbon Initiatives at UWE: Sharing Best Practice

Welcome

In this short presentation I am very pleased to be able to share with you some of the low carbon initiatives that we have been developing and implementing at UWE. These are measures that we have adopted as best practice across the University. They work for us, and have generated many benefits with regards to cost savings, fulfilling our social responsibilities, as well as meeting changing legal requirements in this area.

There are many challenges that we all face as we progress and move forward on this agenda, however, I'm sure you will all agree with me that the importance of achieving a more low carbon society cannot be overstated.

At UWE we aim to lead by example and I am very proud to speak to you today as the VC of an organization that has worked in partnership with our students and staff, to achieve 3rd place in the Green League 2008 for Environmental performance in the Higher Education sector. We also achieved a score of 72% in the Business in the Community Corporate Responsibility Index, and 75% in the Environment Index in 2008. The measures we have taken also enabled us to cut our gas consumption by 46% in the 2006/2007 academic year, and we have reduced our carbon emissions, in relation to our energy use, by 25% from our 2001 levels. We aim to increase this reduction to 30% by 2011/12. We are also working towards a KPI of a 1% annual reduction in our natural resource use, and currently have a recycling rate of 35%.

None of this has been easy, but with commitment, innovation and through raising awareness we have made much progress. It is from this basis that I stand here to share with you some of the measures that have proven to be effective for us, some of the components that have been fundamental to our success so far, and those that have enabled us to establish a platform for continuous improvement.

So what are we doing? At UWE our approach has mainly focused on the following areas, structural adaptation, innovation and research, educational provision, transport, and infrastructure.

First of all there is structural adaptation. Creating a facilitative culture has been a key component in our success so far. Structural changes have provided a focal point for activity and a visualization of our commitment to low carbon initiatives and sustainability at UWE. Examples of this include the introduction of a sustainability board to coordinate activity and lead the University's response to the multifaceted problems we are all facing with regards to carbon reduction and sustainability. In addition, each faculty and professional service has, or is developing a Sustainability Group, so we are genuinely embedding a sustainable approach across the whole institution. This enables a truly collective response, which is critical to our success, and is fundamental to drive the enhancement of our performance on this agenda even further.

We have also launched the Institute for Sustainability, Health and the Environment, otherwise known as ISHE, in order to bring our many activities in this area together. This enables us to drive progress and innovation in this field much more efficiently and effectively. Grouping our activities together in the form of ISHE and providing a clear point of contact also facilitates our external communications and the exchange of knowledge that is critical to this agenda, and reflects the value we place on partnership.

We have also introduced an internal group, called 'Knowledge Exchange for Sustainability Education', which explores and promotes pedagogic developments in this area.

In order to support and embed these changes we have embarked on several behaviour change campaigns, encouraging environmentally responsible practices in both our staff and students. This would seem crucial for any organization to truly embed such an approach. At UWE a couple of examples include the student switchoff scheme in halls of residence, drawing on inter-hall rivalry to foster a culture of energy saving, which we have happily supported with cash prizes. Encouraging sustainable behaviour is also built into our induction process for new staff, where our energy saving tips help the environment as well as reduce the energy and resource costs that we face as an institution.

As a University we are also supporting innovation and research into sustainability. ISHE has some 300 experts, 100 courses, and 16 research centres. We are very pleased to be engaged in a large range of exciting and highly valuable research projects addressing critical issues in this field, as well as how they impact on our local communities and the Bristol region. For example, we have PhD students working on projects such as the co-management of carbon with air pollutants; and collective members of the Institute are also producing and examining forecasts for the carbon futures of the Bristol region, one of the aims of which is to identify a sustainable carbon management position for the Bristol region in 2050.

Our significant expertise and commitment has allowed us to attract much research funding in this area, a specific example is the recent EPSRC large grant looking into Sustainable Neighbourhoods Adapting to Climate Change.

Communication and dissemination of these findings, in order to maximise their benefit, is fundamental to UWE. This is why we established the Science Communication Unit which is designed to engage the public with science. One of the activities of this unit is to publish the European Commission's Science for Environment Policy News Alert.

All of these research activities and the ethos of knowledge sharing and exchange, feed in to our educational provision. At UWE we are embracing our role and responsibilities in training the next generation of thinkers and leaders. This is why we aim to ensure that every student is exposed to the core issues of sustainable development during their study at UWE. We are also introducing new course provision at undergraduate and postgraduate level that specifically focuses on climate change and carbon management. In addition to this UWE has a very effective and dynamic short course programme which allows us to share our expertise and provide practical learning solutions, many of which address the implications and challenges of the sustainability agenda for business, in areas such as energy management, land use planning and transport.

I am pleased to be able to say that we are also very active and innovative as a university community, in transforming knowledge into practice, for example in our transport plans and infrastructure. We have an award winning travel plan and have taken a variety of measures to reduce car travel to the university, for example through car share spaces, our hourbike pay as you go cycle network, our cycle scheme offering discounted cycle purchase and the Ulink bus service which is one of the lowest emission bus fleets in Europe.

We have also achieved environmental awards for our buildings which incorporate new and advanced technologies that reduce energy demand, therefore reducing carbon emissions as well as costs. Our Architecture building and the expansion of R block are both good examples of this.

At UWE we are very fortunate to have a significant opportunity to develop the sustainability of our infrastructure much further as we progress with our masterplan for the expansion of the Frenchay campus. In the next decade we will strive to build a sustainable campus, embracing new technologies and advancements, to encourage change and provide a very positive example of what can be achieved. We will strive to create a healthy and sustainable learning environment, where the reduction of carbon emissions through our design process is a key priority.

As my call to action, I share with you some of the factors that have been important to us in our success so far and have enabled us to build a solid basis for further progress towards a low carbon and sustainable environment. For us these have been; senior ownership and commitment, so important for progress and cultural change. This has enabled us to integrate a low carbon approach into our strategy and structures as well as supplier appraisal. We have put in place a number of focused KPIs to monitor our progress ensuring that we are able to identify areas where we need to do much more. Our initiatives have been well supported by the culture of innovation and partnership at UWE, where we embrace new ideas and constantly challenge accepted knowledge to drive progress. We have been embedding a sustainable and 'healthy university' culture across UWE which again provides a supportive environment for low carbon initiatives, one example is the monthly farmers market which is held on the Frenchay campus.

These factors have enabled us to achieve a range of successes in our low carbon initiatives as I have briefly outlined. We have enjoyed the benefits, in terms of reducing costs, fulfilling our social responsibilities, and ensuring that we meet and are prepared for changes to environmental legal requirements.

In all of our activity we strive to be transparent and should you require any more information, particularly any more detail about what we have been doing, how we have achieved and are driving our successes forward, and how we may be able to assist you as we progress together, then please approach ISHE, or take a look at our strategy and policy commitments online.

I hope we can work together to move forward as we address this critical agenda. We hope you will join us in setting tough but beneficial targets for the year ahead. We all have a part to play and must make a difference. Thank you for your time.

