

Student Perception Survey on Recycling 2008

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

In April 2008, the first 'Student Perception Survey on Recycling at Harper Adams University College' was launched. The purpose of the survey was to establish the student's views on recycling in general and recycling at the College. Their views on recycling at the College was of particular interest in establishing whether there was sufficient information available to them on the College's policy on recycling and the facilities available to recycle.

The results would form the basis for any improvements being made to the recycling facilities at the University College and identify any gaps for educating the students about the three 'R's'; Reduce, Re-use and Recycle, to reduce the amount of rubbish going to landfill, a particular concern with landfill tax increasing year on year.

2. Respondents

The survey was answered by 60 respondents, with an equal split of 30 male and 30 female. 31 of the respondents lived off-campus and 29 lived on campus. This was a response rate of 2.7% of the student population.

3. Questions

The survey was split into the following sections:

1. The student's personal views about recycling, such as; their attitude to recycling, how important recycling is to them, what motivates them to recycle, how much they recycled and why others chose not to recycle.
2. The student's opinions about the services provided at the University College, such as; how satisfied they were with the current services, how convenient it is to recycle at the University College, signage, information provided about recycling, general size and location of the bins provided and the frequency they are emptied.
3. The student's views regarding information provided by the University College about the benefits of recycling to the students and the environment, incentives to recycle, awareness, awards and competitions, environmental champions and what they think about their peers and recycling.

A stand alone section on lecture notes was included in the survey because it is estimated that the majority of all printing produced by the Reprographics department is lecture notes. The University College is therefore investigating new ways to make a positive change to reduce paper consumption, without causing disruption or deterioration to the teaching given to the students.

4. Student's were asked for their opinions on the number of lecture notes produced, such as; were they satisfied with the number of lecture notes/hand outs produced, should the number be reduced, would they prefer them electronically, and additional comments.

4. Results in brief

The responses received to the survey were very promising and are summarised below.

4.1 Views about recycling

Importance of recycling – First year students were particularly keen to recycle at the University College, stating that it was **quite important** to recycle, would **recycle even if it required additional effort** and wanted to know more about the facilities available on campus. Interestingly, it was the students living off campus that felt recycling was **very important**, but would recycle **if it did not require additional effort**. Off campus students can recycle via the Council kerbside recycling scheme. The University College has self-catering and non-catering halls of residence. The survey showed from the responses that the more positive attitude towards recycling came from Gloucester and Harris halls of residence.

This was surprising, as the better response rate was expected to come from the self-catering halls where the opportunity to recycle was greater. Those that responded in the self-catering halls still considered recycling to be **very important** and **quite important**.

Motivation - The students appreciate the importance of recycling, reducing rubbish going to landfill and how it will affect the environment and future generations and in doing so feel that it's the right thing to do to save resources and reduce pollution. With landfill space diminishing quickly in the UK, the students are aware of the principles of reusing and recycling.

How much is recycled – all the students recycled in some form or other. Interestingly no-one admitted openly that they did not recycle, however when asked why they didn't recycle these responses were given; *“not producing enough recyclable material”, “too much hassle/inconvenient”, “much easier to put in the general waste bin”*. The comments related to the lack of facilities preventing them from recycling and not enough information being given about the location of the recycling bins around the campus.

Services at the University College – The students were asked questions about the recycling facilities and services available at the University College and were designed to establish whether these facilities and services were adequate and/or being effectively utilised. There was a high level of dissatisfaction with how convenient it was to recycle, the information available regarding the location of the recycling bins. This indicated an area for improvement. The students were mostly satisfied with the signs on the bins or near them, the size of them and the frequency that they were emptied, with only a small percentage being dissatisfied. Because the number of dissatisfied students was very low, there would be no change to the size of the bins or the frequency of them being emptied.

Incentives/Benefits of recycling - This question was intended to capture the general feeling of the Students regarding the benefits to them personally to recycle at the College. No financial or award based incentive has currently been offered to encourage students to use the facilities provided for recycling. Co-operation has been relied upon the student's personal inclination to recycle and their views on the changing climate. Although most the students have stated that they recycle, there is a clear level of dissatisfaction, that they are not getting anything personally out of it other than the feel good factor.

Awareness - There was a high level of dissatisfaction regarding the lack of awareness raising events and workshops, with a majority of 40 respondents (66.6%) being quite **dissatisfied** and **very dissatisfied**. This is an area identified for improvement and would be easy to implement.

Awards, competitions and environmental champions - 60% of the students were with the number of awards, competitions and environment champions currently at the University College. This highlighted the potential that there could be a body of students who would be willing to get involved in improving the level of awareness around the University College and take action to improve things. This is an area identified for improvement and investigation.

Peer Groups – The students were asked how satisfied they were with the number of students recycling at the University College and enforcement of recycling at the University College respectively. Fifty out of sixty (83%) students said they were **quite dissatisfied** and **very dissatisfied** with the number of students recycling with only nine being **quite satisfied** and one being **very satisfied**. 63% of the students were **quite dissatisfied** and **very dissatisfied** about the level of enforcement to recycle, but interestingly most respondents to this question were mostly from second and third years. This is a possible area for investigation and possibly improvement, but could be labour intensive and difficult to manage.

4.2 Lecture Notes

The students were asked for their views on the number of handouts given out in lectures; asking if they were happy with the number of handouts, could they be reduced or could they be produced electronically. They are currently uploaded to Moodle; an in-house learning resource. The handing out of lecture notes has been a long standing tradition of the University College's however, in the interest of conserving the environment; it is investigating new ways to make a positive change to reduce paper consumption without causing disruption or deterioration to the teaching given.

The majority of the students were **very satisfied** with the amount of handouts; this response was spread across all the years responding. Looking closer at the responses it was apparent that the number of male first years that were **very satisfied** with the number of handouts is matched by a near equal number of male first years that are **dissatisfied, very dissatisfied and would prefer lecture notes electronically**. It appears from the results that it is the male respondents that seem to hold a stronger opinion on this issue either for or against, whereas the female respondents are either very satisfied or quite satisfied across all the years.

Those that chose **other** had these comments to make;

“Definitely not electronically - you need to print them out and we would only have to print them out ourselves”

“It is a lot of paper but handouts are required for effective learning and revision”

“Not enough lecture notes! We all have to print them off, which cost us money we don't have. Reading purely from a computer screen is not good.”

“Putting them on moodle is a pain in the neck for students!!!! Please give us the lecture notes to in fill in the lecture!!! It makes the lecture flow much better too. We can always recycle after the exams”

“Satisfied with the number of handouts: you need the notes so better for lecturer to print them out, as cheaper for student”

“Some are wasteful some are not”

“Very dissatisfied with the number of handouts, this could be reduced dramatically: Sometimes lecture notes are handed out so thick that they cannot even be hole punched!!! This is due to only 1 or 2 slides from PowerPoint presentation being on a single page never mind that the back has not been used either. No wonder the paper bill for the college is at around 55,000!!!!”

“What does this have to do with recycling??!”

There are mixed responses to this question. These highlight the need for further investigation with some joint consultation taking place where both lecturers and students can share their opinions, make suggestions and possibly come to a solution that both sides will be happy with while doing our bit to reduce the paper consumption.

5. Recommendations

The list of recommendations below were based on the received responses and intended to improve the facilities, information pertaining to these facilities in place at the time the survey was conducted, extend the facilities and services into the other self-catering halls and houses and take the University College one step closer to becoming more environmentally friendly and reducing the amount of waste going to landfill.

- Improve the signage around the University College to highlight the location of the recycling facilities. Update the campus maps.
- Develop a guide to recycling at Harper Adams to highlight what can be recycled at the University College and where and provide information for those living off-campus about the facilities available and locations outside the University College grounds.
- Install more recycling bins in the self-catering halls and houses to enable them to recycle and reduce the amount of recyclates going into the general rubbish and into landfill.
- Recruit Champions within the student body to encourage fellow students to recycle more and give advice on what can and cannot be recycled and where.
- Organise more awareness raising events to educate the students on environmental issues, recycling facilities, the benefits of recycling and what happens to the materials sent away for recycling.
- Organise more events and competitions relating to environment, sustainability and recycling and give the students incentives for their participation and achievements.

- Set up a Process Redesign Group to review current printing habits and find amicable and alternative ways to reduce unnecessary paper consumption, with lecture notes being a topic for discussion.

6. Conclusion

The responses to the survey were very promising and constructive. It highlighted a number of areas that could be improved or introduced but it also gave a varied and interesting insight into the views of the students on recycling and the environment. Many of the students; would recycle more if they had more information about the facilities and locations of them to do so, were unhappy about the number of fellow students who were not yet recycling and felt that they should protect future resources and the environment. With this support from the students, the potential to recycle more and reduce waste is possible.

Interestingly the survey highlighted that more males were keen to recycle compared to females and this was apparent in the first and second years. This could be contributory to the education younger people now get from their local Council and schools to recycle at home and then bring this experience and knowledge with them.

The question on lecture notes highlighted the mixed views of what is considered enough where paper is concerned with male respondents having a stronger opinion than females about the issue. The one comment about what had lecture notes got to do with recycling was quite poignant in that it has everything to do with recycling and shows a lack of understanding and an area for improvement where raising awareness is needed.

Some of the recommendations were already in progress when the results were gathered, such as the guide to recycling, the purchase of the bins for the rest of self-catering halls and houses, the student champions; with the Environment Conservation and Sustainability Society being set up around the same time the survey went out and the improved signage with the campus maps having the recycling points added. The student's responses therefore confirmed the changes were needed to improve the recycling rate and reduce waste going to landfill, so in theory the changes should make a significant difference in behaviour. The proof will be reflected in the reports we receive from our waste contractors and our Porters.

The other recommendations are based around raising awareness and looking into ways to incentivise the students to be more aware of the amount of waste they produce and the impact this has on the environment and these will be ongoing actions throughout the academic year.

It is intended that this survey will be run annually to see if the student's perceptions have changed.