

GI support call – Sustainability Collaborations with Students’ Unions

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Attended by

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Group discussion

Q Who are the best contacts at the students’ union (SU) to engage with on sustainability?

- Elected officers – these may be full time sabbatical posts or part time non-sabbatical posts. Having officer endorsement of sustainability initiatives or issues will be a great way of reaching student audiences. Part time officers will likely have less time to dedicate to the role, however it’s worth making introductions to all officers early on when they’re in post (June/July) so they’re aware of your work and you can find out about their interests and key campaigns so you can identify how you can support one another. Do get to know the full officer team, as their interests may be broader than their title suggests! (e.g. sports officers who have degrees in sustainability, or welfare officers interested in the energy efficiency of student accommodation).
- Student societies – there may be existing student groups who have an interest in sustainability (e.g. people and planet, engineers without borders etc), these groups can be useful for wider promotion of a campaign or in identifying volunteers for a sustainability opportunity.
- SU staff – staff members provide continuity to the work of the SU, and whilst flagship campaigns are led by the officer team, wider strategic aims and long-term plans will be overseen by staff, so building good relationships is worth doing and will help to frame what your team do to the officer team.
- SU commercial staff – these staff will be less involved with the student officers on a day to day basis, but can be useful contacts to pilot new initiatives in a catering/commercial environment, again reaching out directly to a student audience (e.g. compostable take-away containers, incentives/loyalty cards for re-usable cups, fairtrade/local produce)

Q How can we support each other’s sustainability work?

- At the least you should be aware of what each other are working on, so you can complement each project with your respective expertise. Having some understanding of current projects will enable you to champion each other’s projects to wider internal/external audiences through your day to day work (Green Impact!).
- Volunteer recruitment/management – SU can often reach wider student audiences and may have some ongoing support/resources/awards to support student volunteers which you may want to sign post your students to. (E.g. QUB are linking into their SUs ‘volunteering loyalty card’ which provides rewards like branding cups as students pick up volunteering hours)
- Social media – make sure to follow each other on twitter/facebook/Instagram to identify any new projects you were unaware of, and sharing campaign posts is a quick and easy way of utilising each other’s networks.

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- Existing thematic steering/working groups are an excellent structure to enable both university and SU representatives around the same table to discuss key issues early in the development of any policies, initiatives or campaigns (e.g. fairtrade, carbon management working groups).
- Themed weeks such as fairtrade fortnight/green week provide a great opportunity to collaborate, and a clear deadline on the horizon of when activities will happen. Hosting joint events, sharing the schedule or budget can be successful. Note the [NUS 'SDG Teach in'](#) event taking place 19th- 23rd Feb, may also be a good opportunity for collaboration on a national event.

Q How can you work together on Green Impact specifically?

- Invite your SU to be part of the Green Impact project team early in the year, so they can feel part of the planning of the project, get to know your NUS project officer and enable them to take ownership over specific elements.
- Toolkit content – there may be key campaigns the SU are leading on which are also relevant to staff which could be encompassed within your toolkit.
- Room bookings – your SU will often have more informal space which could be suitable for some of your Green Impact training/meetings.
- Green Impact Project Assistants/ auditors – recruitment of these students, but also attendance of the officer team can be a great learning opportunity for them whilst reaching out to new student groups.
- Become a Green Impact team – often SUs participate in the universities GI project to set a good example for other departments to take part. Be aware however that they may also be taking part in 'Green Impact Students' Unions' check [here](#), which is more rigorous and may limit their capacity to participate in both schemes.
- Discuss and engage on issues within the Green Impact Students' Union toolkit, to help your SU gain points and reach their desired accreditation.

Q What is the difference between Green Impact Students' Unions and Green Impact at the university?

- Green Impact Students' Unions is the national sustainability accreditation scheme specifically for HE SUs run by NUS. All SUs work to the same toolkit, which includes far reaching elements of sustainability (including their ability to engage and influence the university on sustainability issues) and broader than the behaviour change focus of the organisational version of Green Impact. You can find out more about GISU and the actions within the toolkit [here](#).
- Specific areas where you may want to engage on are 'Knowledge and Understanding, Leadership and Strategy, Partnership and Policy'.
- Note the submission deadline for SUs in 2018 is April 13th, so don't leave your conversations too late.