Environment

AGORA

a supplement of the AUCU newsletter

Why is UCU interested in the Environment?

There is now little credible doubt that climate change caused by human activity is one of the key challenges to our way of life. UCU wants to play its part in "greening the campus and the curriculum" by mobilising its 120,000 members to help in the battle we all face. The plan to achieve this is through; i) environment reps who will negotiate locally for greener workplaces and curriculum; ii) cooperation with other unions and student representatives to press for carbon reducing strategies and iii) liaising with other trade unions and the TUC to encourage greener policies from Government.

AUCU has just set-up an Environmental Focus Group to drive this agenda. If you are interested in helping, contact the AUCA Environment Rep Adam Price (a.price@abdn.ac.uk).

The Carbon Management Plan

Did you realise how seriously the University of Aberdeen takes its role in reducing the environmental impact of life in the UK? The answer is very seriously, and it will affect you! There is lots going on and much of it is detailed on the web pages of the Environment Office (www.abdn.ac.uk/estates/environment). Biggest of all is the Carbon Management Plan (CMP) which was approved by the University Management Group in May 2010 and now on the Estates web site (www.abdn.ac.uk/estates/environment/about/documents/ UoACMPMarch2010R2190410.pdf). It is a major and most welcome commitment to changing the impact of the way we work. The headline aim of the 27 page plan is to reduce the carbon emissions by 20% from the baseline date of 2009 (29 million tons) to the year 2014, saving 6.3 million tons of CO_2 and an estimated £1.5 m from the annual energy bill. Prominent in the plan is the University's Low Carbon Vision which is worth reading carefully;

The University of Aberdeen is committed to the management and reduction of carbon dioxide and equivalent emissions: "We will embed this issue at the heart of institutional strategy and will ensure that our reductions targets and the reasons for establishing them are understood at all levels of the organisation. We will encourage a culture of collective responsibility and will ensure that staff and students are empowered to act to achieve those targets. In so doing we aim to play a full part in the transition towards a low-carbon future."

The adoption of a target first requires a decision of what to count as a part of the carbon footprint and then to accurately assess the baseline figure. What is to be counted is fuel (gas, electricity, oil) used in buildings, business transport (including University-owned and staff-owned vehicles and commuting), water use and waste products (e.g. land fill emissions). What is not included is direct nitrous oxide emission, refrigerant leaks or embedded carbon within items purchased by the University. The baseline assessment indicated 82% of emission arose from buildings, 13% from transport, 3% from housing and 2% from waste. Energy use from buildings was effectively calculated based on meter readings, but for the transport there was a reliance on the Transport Surveys of 2008 and on expenses claims through finance which may result in some underestimation.

The strategy to reduce carbon footprint is partly conceived as individual carbon reduction projects, of which there are 10 currently in operation and a further 60 planned. These vary in size, cost and contribution to the target. Examples include a £14k project

to insulate the roof of Regent which will save 16 t CO_2 annually, a £79 k project to switch off computers remotely which started last year and which is expected to save 126 t CO_2 annually and a £2.8 m project planned for 2011 to install a combined heating and power plant at Foresterhill which will save 1,060 t CO_2 annually.

The second thrust of the strategy is to instil a sense of community ownership of the objective of carbon reduction so that it is embedded in decisions made at every level of University activity, from routine operating procedures of schools and colleges to encouraging individual responsibility through recognition of staff who help with the targets. This will be achieved through communication and training (coming your way soon!).

What's not in the plan is any comment about transport as it relates to commuting and car parking, which will have a large impact on the carbon footprint yet it is an area of policy which provokes strong reactions amongst members. Nor is there any specific comment on reducing business travel through video conferencing or distance teaching which might prove powerful tools in the drive to reduce energy use. The plan does not give any indication of what happens after 2014. The Scottish Government have a target of 42% reduction by 2020 and 80% by 2050 (www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/ climatechange/scotlands-action/climatechangeact). The University will be working to those targets, so while the Carbon Management Plan is a great first step, there is plenty more to do. Your help will be needed.

What can you do?

There are loads of ways you can change the way you work that will reduce environmental impact and no doubt you will be bombarded with ideas over the coming years. But here we give you three to be think about.

Reduce impact of printing- Instead of using the printer by your computer all the time, why not use one of the multifunction devices (MFDs- printers/copiers) that are installed all round campus. The thing is, it's easy to print double sided on them. How to use them? Go to the start button, go to settings and click on printers. On there you should see something called MFD-PULL-BW. You can set that as default printer by right- clicking on it and choosing set as default. Then when you want to print, it goes to a holding location and will be printed off any network machine that you swipe into, and its default setting is double sided. It is so easy. If, when you try to set an MFD as default, no such

printer is available you can get it up by putting \\printing1 into the run box in the start menu. Then you have to find MFD-PULL-BW in the list an click on it. It takes a while to initialise but eventually it is added to your list. It also allows you to load into your printer list a colour printer. That one is MFD-PULL-COLOUR so you can go to the nearest networked colour printer and get that printed off in colour.

Don't travel, Skype- Sarah Dalrymple has written a short article giving her experience of getting the best out of Skype to hold international meetings while not moving. This is the beginning of technology that could revolutionise the impact of our networking activities. Read Sarah's her article "How Skype changed my life (a little bit): recent experiences of a self-minuting, international meeting" on page 3.

Cycle to work- Chris Osbeck in the Environment Office recons that 4.7% of staff cycle to work and the University has a target of reaching 8% by 2012. If met, that would mean 240 fewer parking spaces occupied addition to safer, less congested streets and cleaner air! Ditching the car is big step for someone who is not a regular cyclist. But if anyone has been to the Netherlands, they have seen what can be achieved by a change in culture. For someone who is a regular cyclist I think its by far the best way to get around a city. But I suspect it is concern for safety that is a major determinant keeping numbers down. We can try to do something about that if there are enough voices pressing the University, Council and Government to do something serious about road safety for cyclists. If you are interest in this issue contact me (a.price@abdn.ac.uk) or check out Aberdeen Cycle Forum (www.aberdeencycleforum.org.uk/). Let's get active! And don't forget, if you found a parking space today, thank a cyclist.

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Don't travel, Skype

Cycle to work

Think "ENVIRONMENT"!

What are the students up to?

The Aberdeen University Students Association (AUSA) is really on the ball on environment issues. They have lots of initiatives and projects that UoA staff might learn from and support. Many are organised through their Environment and Ethics committee currently chaired by Henriette Mohr (enviroethics@abdn.ac.uk). AUSA have recently been awarded a £111,000 Student Climate Change grant fund three staff to make meaningful measurement carbon use and raise awareness of environmental sustainability issues on campus. Current projects include Vegbag (get your £5 weekly, organic, vegbag delivered straight to campus); Garden Juice (give your garden or your office plants a boost with free coffee grounds); Green Fingers (helping people grow their own veg?); Lift share (an initiative that saves the planet and thousands of pounds on travel); Recycling (ideas and facilities to make recycling easier). Energy Efficiency Workshops (giving the skills to carry out an energy audits).   What to know about any of these, contact climatechangeproject@abdn.ac.uk.

We can help the students! AUSA are looking for lecturers who would be willing to display a slide outlining the project at the start of their courses. This is a simple thing many of could do which will help the journey towards making people across campus think "ENVIRONMENT".

How Skype changed my life ...   *see next page...*

How Skype changed my life (a little bit)

Sarah Dalrymple writes...

How Skype changed my life (a little bit): recent experiences of a self-minuting, international meeting.

I have been using Skype, the internet-based communication software, to call collaborators in the USA from my work PC for a few months now. Skype is free to download and free to make Skype-to-Skype calls, you can choose whether to use audio only or include a video link if your computer has a webcam (we did not). We liked it because it is free and using a headset means you can share, and work on, documents as you both sit at your respective computers. We tried a three-way conference call (Aberdeen-Portland-St Louis) in the hope that three of us who were co-authoring a paper, could discuss it simultaneously but found the call quality to be poor. We were being interrupted by background noise and the disconcerting echo of our own voices. Even when the sound quality was good, the interjection of one of us had the effect of cutting off another speaker so even affirmative noises of 'mmm' and 'uh huh' interrupted the flow of conversation. We gave up after a couple of attempts.

One of the other features of Skype is the text box, an instant messaging service which we use to check whether the others were at their desk and ready to receive a call. I have recently joined a 'young professionals' discussion forum linked to my research area. This group had attempted a Skype conference call between 15 people across the world. They too had found problems with the meeting dynamics but with the added complication from dodgy internet connections for those of the group that were attempting to participate from remote field stations. The convener suggested that we use the instant messaging facility in Skype and indeed, this worked really well. I offered to 'take minutes' and simply cut and pasted the whole conversation into Word for editing.

There are many advantages of instant messaging over email: making people confirm availability and contribute within a specified time frame creates a very different dynamic to a drawn out email thread that might get ignored whilst more pressing emails need dealing with. It is therefore, a really good way of having a long-distance brainstorming session. In addition, it is still possible to have a bit of informal banter – our last meeting clashed with the semi-finals of the world cup, our Amsterdam contact was updating us on how the Netherlands were doing in realtime!

Just as in a face-to-face meeting, the convener had put together an agenda and papers for discussion ahead of the 'meeting'. The convener asked each 'attendee' to introduce themselves (a readymade list of those present and their affiliations and location), then reminded us of a few ground rules (stay focussed, keep to time) and used the agenda to structure the meeting. This again lent itself very well to the minutes as the discussion had readymade subheadings. The attendees also pasted excerpts from reports they had read or provided URLs to websites they referred to, which we could all follow because Skype automatically adds a hyperlink when you paste in the URL. If people have Google Earth they can even provide a grid reference to places they are in or talking about – the wonders of web 2.0!

Want to know more about the environment and climate change?

You could do worse than check out The Guardian's top 10 web sites:-

http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007/aug/09/environment

(with thanks to Amy Gray, Environment Office).