

CASE STUDY: McNICHOLAS

BACKGROUND

McNicholas is a leading provider of services to the UK's multi-utility, telecommunications, gas, power, water, renewable energy, and rail sectors. They employ over 1,500 people and turnover in excess of £170m. As a large business they have an extensive client portfolio including Virgin Media, Network Rail, Crossrail, Fulcrum, firmus and Phoenix Natural Gas.

McNicholas strategic approach to sustainability, 'The 'S' Word', was a concerted effort to adopt a simple and informal style to the way sustainability is embedded throughout the organisation. Emma Ward, Group Sustainability Manager, works within the Safety and Sustainability Department and reports to Steven McNicholas, Safety and Sustainability Director.



According to Emma, their approach to sustainability is to encourage new and innovative best practice that can also be offered to McNicholas' Clients. "Sustainability is an ever evolving and growing opportunity" says Emma "with subjects as diverse as relational procurement, supplier engagement, resource management, well-being, communities and people development all part of our sustainable agenda."

INITIAL ENGAGEMENT

McNicholas first heard about the School in 2012 as a result of the Launch event held in London. As an organisation that has embraced the sustainability agenda for many years, they recognised many of the speakers featuring on the agenda and decided to attend to find out more. Emma attended this event and was delighted to see that the construction industry had recognised the potential impact of a collaborative approach, and that key resources were being made available in one place and most importantly were free to access.

SELF-ASSESSMENT & ACTION PLAN



After attending this event, McNicholas signed up to the School, completed their first self-assessment and started to 'explore' the wide range of resources available. Emma completed the self-assessment on behalf of the business, and took care to ensure that the responses were reflective of the wider business rather than her own personal knowledge. A phone call from the School in 2013 prompted her to re-assess, and her action plan led her to some of the School's e-learning modules and face to face training courses. Emma has since attended workshops on Sustainable Procurement, Carbon, and has also used several of the School's e-learning modules.

For McNicholas, working through their action plans methodically is not their first priority as they are not relying on this to inform development in sustainability. However they do consider the School a valuable tool to help sense check existing activity in this field, and are using the School as a key resource to help provide steer in the re-drafting of their sustainability strategy.

IMPACT

As a result of engaging in the School McNicholas has:

- ✓ **Used the resources available through the School to help inform the review/upgrade of their sustainability strategy the 'S Word'.** Internal working groups have been created based on the School's 10 key issues and maturity matrices are being developed. Each group is producing mini action plans for internal review (using the School's resources and self-assessment tool), and will align with clients against standardised criteria.
- ✓ **Plans to use Schools resources to create bespoke sustainability learning packages.** These will feature the School's e-learning modules and face to face training workshops, and will link in directly to the new strategy.

- ✓ **Plans to promote the School to their own supply chain** – this will happen through 2015 after the updated strategy has been published.
- ✓ **Promoted their engagement in the School to existing and potential customers.** McNicholas include their School membership in tender documentation where relevant, and have helped to raise awareness of the School amongst their client base, for example Virgin Media.

BENEFITS

Efficiencies – The training provided through the School, both face to face and in the form of e-learning modules is highly valued by McNicholas. The action plans currently in use includes recommendations to use the School’s e-learning modules and to attend training workshops. Without these resources investment in other training packages would be required, which would not only cost more, but could also slow down progress.

Competitive advantage – In recent years McNicholas have noticed an increase in the weighting of sustainability criteria in the tender process. They believe the School is a recognised and well respected marque, and that by being active members and promoting their level of engagement to their customers, they are increasing their competitive advantage.

Access to high quality resources covering the 3 pillars of sustainability – McNicholas value the School as a reference point for finding out about specific sustainability related issues, and regard the School as a key building block in both the development and implementation of their new strategy.

As summarised by Emma, “For McNicholas ‘The Supply Chain Sustainability School’ is a great resource. It allows us to research issues, share information and use it to develop our workforce on a wide range of sustainability topics. We are also using it to shape what our sustainable future looks like as it enables us to look at benchmarks in best practice and provide training and awareness throughout the company.”

LESSONS LEARNED

Identified sustainable relational procurement and supplier engagement as priority areas for action in 2015. McNicholas have attended School workshops on sustainable procurement and recognise the importance of focusing efforts on embedding sustainability considerations within their supply chain. This priority will be reflected in the new ‘S Word’.

Better understanding of client priorities and challenges – McNicholas use the School on a regular basis as a tool to help prepare for client meetings. They search through the resources available to help understand more about client priorities and relevant topical issues. This helps them to maintain a professional image and demonstrate that sustainability is being integrated into the business.

THE FUTURE

In order for the School to continue to be of benefit to McNicholas it is important to:

- ✓ Keep action plan simple and easy to use.
- ✓ Create an App which can be used for viewing the general resources as well as the self-assessment and action plan.
- ✓ Continue to use Twitter.
- ✓ Ensure the School’s resource library remains up to date and that it continues to provide an insight into the challenges ahead.
- ✓ Consider monthly hot topics, similar to the ‘Wendy’s Wednesdays’ approach.
- ✓ Consider providing workshops / toolkits on how to write policies and strategies.
- ✓ Continue to grow the number of School partners, with particular focus on clients such as Network Rail.

