

greenminds insight paper

**A Collaborative Approach
for Art, Education & External
Partnerships.**



Introduction

The Green Minds model engages ‘Changing Values and Attitudes to Nature’ as central to the mission of rewilding people and places. The arts help us express how we relate to the world as human beings and a defining proposition from Arts University Plymouth is that the world needs creatives now, more than ever.

Arts University Plymouth’s Participation in Green Minds:

- 428 students
- 9838 student curriculum hours
- 23 projects
- 17 public art works and 2 exhibitions
- 11 paid commissions

Society faces a critical and urgent need to rebuild its relationship with the environment and as a catalyst for change the arts have a crucial role to play.¹

Arts University Plymouth was the creative partner in the Green Minds project, as it resonated with the university’s established mission for creative learning and social and environmental justice. It was important to model an approach that drew from the shared values and missions of the university and the Green Minds project, and embed these within our working method.

Arts University Plymouth’s Development Team represented the university in the project partnership, worked with partners to identify and create opportunities, and managed these within the university; a dedicated Project Coordinator provided crucial consistency and momentum to the activity.

As part of Green Minds, students from Arts University Plymouth produced seventeen creative works and two exhibitions that have been showcased at partner and public sites; these include murals, interpretation boards, sculpture, photography and textiles. Alongside these works, staff and students have also created digital assets, designed the Green Minds brand identity, hosted workshops, photographed community projects, and participated in Green Minds public events. We are extremely proud of the high quality of work our students produced and this is only part of the story.

In our approach to this project we made a commitment to value students’ participation just as much as their output. We understand the importance of this balance in enhancing students’ creative and professional development, as well as their relationship with nature.

¹ Prof. Stephen Felmingham, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) Arts University Plymouth, 2022: see youtube.com/watch?v=Iso9i9x0mW8&feature=youtu.be



Arts University Plymouth Principals

All activity should be reciprocal, meaningful, and impactful for our students both in terms of the project objectives and the creative learning journey.



It is important that all participation has the potential to contribute to the students' artistic and professional development; Arts University Plymouth staff are best placed to assess this potential.

Students are not to be considered a low cost option for producing prescribed work. Partners are required to invest in these projects in various ways including time, shared knowledge, feedback, and fees.

In line with the Green Minds model we also recognise that our students are complex individuals who can themselves be impacted by these experiences as well as impacting others. Participation in the project will affect their own connection with nature and shape their future actions.

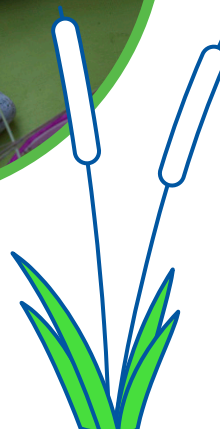
From the very start and throughout this project it was important for us to recognise the benefits for all stakeholders involved in this process; and to continually assess the opportunity for further or future benefit.

Because of this we were able to recognise the dual benefits of a greater depth of individual engagement coupled with more broad involvement across the wider student body.

Challenges

At the start of the Green Minds project activity we identified that some of our partners had not worked closely with a creative institution before. For some this presented itself as preconceptions regarding the potential of collaboration and how it might work, including possible results and output. While this presented a challenge it was also an opportunity for us to positively impact their values and attitudes towards creative practice and demonstrate how art can be utilised as an effective instigator of societal change.

Some additional parameters for us to consider during planning included the structure of the academic year and the importance of giving priority to curriculum and assessment activities for staff and students. Overall, it was clear that the Green Minds project would benefit if the activity we promoted supported these priorities.



Our Approach

Our approach developed over time. On reflection, our best-practice examples had the following characteristics:

Solutions focused

We encouraged partners to present us with challenges or opportunities they had identified rather than pre-empting the outcome. This was realised to a varied extent across projects. Though influenced by external parameters, this mindset helped us create an exploratory dialogue with partners – to exchange knowledge and explore areas of expertise. We also encouraged partners to recognise the value of this activity as part of their own community engagement remits, and our recognition of this was an enabling factor for some partners to invest additional time and energy in the collaborative elements of the process.

Co-creation of briefs

Where possible creative briefs were written collaboratively between all relevant stakeholders including Arts University Plymouth Academic and Development Team staff and Green Minds partners, plus any other relevant community or commercial partners. Similar to a rewilded ecological process, this involved a process of ‘letting go’ regarding specific creative outcomes. We encouraged partners to write briefs which offered clear

parameters where necessary but which were also non-prescriptive where possible. This would allow students to begin with an initial point of inspiration and then evolve and develop their own creative outcomes.

These then became ‘live briefs’ for students to respond to, with our external partners situated as their ‘client’. From here there were two delivery routes:

Integration into the curriculum: This was best suited to projects where the partner was open to exploring a range of potential outcomes that responded to the challenge or opportunity set.

Open-call: If a project brief was tightly defined or required timelines which didn’t align with the curriculum the brief became an ‘open-call’ to students. This also applied in situations where the work required was felt to be too similar to previously completed briefs.

For both routes we aimed to provide students with access to the stakeholders during the briefing process. This ranged from one-off briefing meetings to more intensive engagements such as site visits and workshops depending on partner capacity.



Our Approach

Samples, Pitches and Prototypes

Early projects aimed to deliver a final body of work through the curriculum period. However, as the Green Minds project progressed we transitioned to a preferred delivery model whereby students worked towards a final pitch, sample, or prototype as the culmination of their work. This enabled us to promote the value of participation rather than focus only on the final results.

Sharing and pitch events were taken as important moments to celebrate the students' work as well as to undertake any assessment required for the purpose of the curriculum or commissioning processes. Typically these events were attended by the partner (as client) as well as any other relevant stakeholders and the students, who either individually or working as groups presented their concepts. This included sharing their inspiration, process, sketches or drafts of their ideas, and examples of their previous work.

In order to maximise the impact of the experience for students, Arts University Plymouth sought to ensure that students received feedback on their ideas and their pitches. This was provided by Academic and Development Team staff, clients, and other stakeholders. This feedback was an invaluable part of the students' professional development.



“The value even at the pitching level is incredible - any student who has undertaken this and received feedback will have been functioning at a very assertive and professional level. As far as the course goes the impact is positive, largely in the fact that there is a professional and ethically minded presence adjacent to study. Having opportunities and briefs orbiting the curriculum so students can trial their learning is where we really want our programme to be.

BEN WRIGHT, BA ILLUSTRATION COURSE LEADER

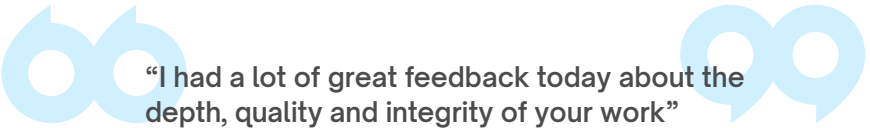


Student Outcomes and Opportunities

At the start of every project, we ensured that the expected and potential outcomes were explicit; typically these included exhibition opportunities or commissions.

In the open-call route the commission opportunities were detailed in full and a commitment made by the partner against this; as students worked on these in their own time it was important that this commitment was in place.

For projects delivered via the curriculum route the commission opportunities were often more loosely defined with the partner confirming that funds were available and commissions a possibility should they find a good fit; here students were able to take more innovative approaches to the brief but the commissioning partner retained discretion on how to proceed. In these examples students were still given credit for their work through their course and the partner was credited for their participation as a community engagement activity. The opportunity to pitch to the client also, in several examples, led to direct commissions for other briefs.



“I had a lot of great feedback today about the depth, quality and integrity of your work”

JEMMA SHARMAN (GREEN MINDS PROJECT LEAD)



CASE STUDY

Interpretation Boards



The National Trust Saltram, a Green Minds partner, wanted an illustrated series of interpretation boards to inform their visitors about the changing habitats that would evolve in their newly fenced off rewilding areas. The Arts University Plymouth Development Team discussed the requirements and matched it to BA (hons) Illustration; course leaders agreed to incorporate it into the curriculum for sixty Year 2 students as part of a professional practice unit with the National Trust Saltram as the client.

The students undertook a site visit to the Saltram estate, learned about their rewilding work, and had time to observe and draw. They then formed teams to collaborate on design proposals over a four week period. At the end of the design period, the students pitched their ideas to the client.

All of the students who participated were credited for their learning as part of the course and received feedback from the client about their work. The selected teams went on to design the final signs; they continued to work and were required to liaise with the client and project manage the work with their peers. When the final works were installed at the National Trust Saltram a celebration event for the students was organised and hosted by the National Trust staff.

Ongoing impacts

Following the success of this project, the Arts University Plymouth Green Minds Coordinator was approached by partners with other opportunities for signage, posters, or interpretation boards.

On these occasions it was decided that the open call route was more appropriate as: repeating a similar project was of limited benefit at the curriculum level; it is better that students have the opportunity to expand their practice; it was important to extend the student body participation beyond a single cohort; the clients would benefit from the opportunity to be exposed to a higher diversity of responses and creative approaches.

It was therefore agreed that these would result in paid commissions for selected students following the final pitch. This ensured that the students would: be appropriately compensated; gain practical experience of managing the business and commercial aspects of their practice; be able to represent this work within their portfolio as a professional commission.

In this approach students were successful in securing commissions against their pitches as well as being further commissioned directly for other opportunities. Once the commission was awarded the primary relationship was between the student and client as a professional arrangement; however Arts University Plymouth remained on hand to assist either side as and when required.

“We were so impressed with the professionalism and enthusiasm of the Arts University Plymouth students”

OWEN FINNIE, (POLLENIZE)

The emergent process was managed by the Arts University Development Team who:

- Encouraged and enabled partners to be open to new ideas and approaches, gauged their appetite for risk and innovation, and guided the project to ensure that their needs would be met
- Identified the most appropriate way to allocate or disseminate opportunities
- Co-wrote briefs to ensure that the creative voice was present from the outset and that briefs provided scope for students to respond creatively and innovate
- Ensured that the client was fully invested in the process and committed resources to the process both as time and/or finance; this included working in partnership with university on the delivery of the brief and providing additional information and resources to the students where required
- Ensured that all expectations and parameters were clear and appropriately managed
- Identified emergent opportunities and instigated ongoing discussions around future working

Outcomes and Impacts

Co-creative processes with reciprocal exchange between stakeholders mirror the natural ecological processes of rewilding. In a classic ecological rewilding context, a key factor is that of ensuring that all the key species are present that are necessary for a fully functioning ecosystem; in a Green Minds context, this means ensuring that all stakeholders are engaged to complete the picture and ensure

equitable outcomes. For Arts University Plymouth, the co-creation and co-delivery of creative briefs was an essential part of this. As with ecological rewilding, the co-creative process required a collaborative and non-prescriptive approach to outcomes. The outcome of this is the evolution of diverse networks and unexpected and socially inclusive developments.

In terms of learning impacts, the students learned how to use their unique creative talents to communicate and promote nature-based solutions from a better informed perspective; enabling students to make a positive difference for nature and to see the value of this for their professional development.

Arts University Plymouth and the Green Minds project benefited from the outlined working model which brings tangible advantages in terms of stakeholder collaboration more broadly:

Students: develop professional skills, confidence, experience, portfolio, grow professional and client networks, impact on their creative practice

Partners: gain experience of the creative and commissioning processes, benefit from exposure to a diverse range of creative responses, source professional creative assets

Project: public engagement deliverables are enhanced at multiple points in the activity, the deep interaction between partners and participant students creates possibility for meaningful impact on values and attitudes, creative works, the final works are a vehicle with which to inform and impact the public, semi-permanent or permanent works create a legacy beyond the end of the project delivery period

University: supports and enhances students vocational skills and employability, raises the profile of the student body and individual students, contributes to public and community engagement deliverables, establishes new networks and partnerships and deepens relationships with current partners, instigates opportunities for emergent research and knowledge exchange activity

Arts University Plymouth's participation in the Green Minds project has benefited our students and our project partners through collaboration on creative projects through the curriculum and live briefs. The model we have developed will continue to influence the way Arts University Plymouth engages with external partners in future projects. For some partner organisations these collaborations have supported their subsequent grant and funding applications by providing evidence of their community and collaborative practices.

When co-creation, co-delivery, and knowledge exchange are applied to a shared commitment to sustainability and environmental justice the impact and legacy of this work is extended and amplified. For Arts University Plymouth, this has provided a catalyst for institutional advances within our own practices, our teaching, research and knowledge exchange; the potential for this to be amplified through our public and community engagement work and as our staff and students pursue their professional practice is substantial. This is demonstrated in our case study of Exploring Hidden Details a collaboration between the University Textiles team and National Trust Saltram as part of Green Minds.

CASE STUDY

Institutional Advances

As part of the Green Minds partnership project, Arts University Plymouth students from BA (Hons) Textile Design visited National Trust Saltram in March 2022, for a design project: Exploring Hidden Details.

Staff from the National Trust hosted the visit and shared their expertise about the estate and its history with the students. The students gathered inspiration from the land, the unique gardens, the flora and fauna, as well as the house at Saltram; they learned that historically the fabrics at Saltram would have been natural. The students then devised a collection of designs using knit and print techniques. The designs created by the students celebrated and highlighted the importance of preserving and developing our outdoor space and allowed them to use nature and the local environment of Saltram to stimulate creative thinking. Their work was exhibited at National Trust Saltram, Arts University Plymouth, and at Plymouth's Lord Mayor's Festival 2022.

"I went to Arts University Plymouth to see the student's present their work and it was really inspiring"

ANDREW CLANFIELD (PCC NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OFFICER & CENTRAL PARK LEAD)

Ongoing impacts:

Exploring Hidden Details will now be used as a basis for an annual curriculum project for the BA (hons) Textile course and a continued partnership with the National Trust Saltram.

The work has been the inspiration for an Arts University Plymouth Knowledge Exchange project funded by Research England; the project is a partnership between the university and the National Trust to establish a dye garden and through the exchange of expertise explore the potential of this for further education, research, and development purposes. Outputs and actions include:

- A series of natural dye workshops at Arts University Plymouth and the National Trust Saltram
- Showcase Exhibition in a regional gallery space
- A digital and physical colour reference archive of colour swatches
- Production of natural dyes for use by the university BA (hons) Textiles Team in curriculum projects
- Continued research and Knowledge Exchange work to expand the scope and scale of activity
- The establishment of a natural dye green house on the university campus



greenminds

“To say you fulfilled the brief is an understatement – the results are better than I had ever hoped.”

JERRY GRIFFITHS (DERRIFORD COMMUNITY PARK) PCC



greenminds

Website www.aup.ac.uk | www.greenmindsplymouth.com
Facebook @NaturePlymouth
Twitter @GreenMindsPlym & @NaturePlymouth
#GreenMindsPlymouth

This project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative.



**REAL
IDEAS**



**ARTS
UNIVERSITY
PLYMOUTH**



**UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH**



SUPPORTING
ENTERPRISES TO
REACH NET ZERO



EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional Development Fund

