

THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH GOES GREENER WITH ISO 14001

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UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

The University of Portsmouth recently boosted its green credentials by gaining ISO 14001 environmental management system (EMS) certification. They are one of only a few universities to have been awarded ISO 14001.

ISO 14001 EMS certification builds on the University's other environmental achievements, which include a Green League First Class Award gained in 2011.

WHY AN EMS AND ISO 14001?

The University of Portsmouth previously identified operational shortcomings, particularly in the control of waste disposal and associated record-keeping.

To manage its environmental impact more effectively and continually improve its environmental performance, the University decided to develop a full EMS and apply for ISO 14001 certification in 2011.

Implemented as part of its Environmental and Sustainable Development Plan, this aimed to:

- take a faster, more direct route to improved environmental performance than available with other schemes
- bring a stronger, more structured approach to its newly expanded environment team's work
- allow a more systematic and thorough approach to legal compliance
- minimise energy and other resource usage, and therefore costs
- focus on the most important environmental issues first (through significance rating and internal audits)
- raise the University's profile in the People & Planet Green League
- gain the external perspective provided by independent audits

EMS IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

The University of Portsmouth began the process by integrating its existing corporate plans, environmental policy and codes of practice into its new EMS.

Several months on, EMS mechanisms have now been embedded in existing procedures across the University, including in the key area of Health & Safety.

After holding interviews with several certification bodies, the University chose SGS to carry out its ISO 14001 assessment.

Charles Joly, Energy and Environment Assistant at the University of Portsmouth, says: "SGS made the effort of bringing a technical member of staff to the selection interview, which added an extra dimension to our discussions. In addition, SGS was clearly committed to accompanying us through the certification process and helping us to improve our environmental performance. "With SGS we have a mutual understanding that this process is an opportunity to develop an embedded and effective EMS, rather than a simple tick-box exercise."

SGS Auditor Dr John Betts says: "In developing the EMS, the University's numerous educational and research disciplines presented quite a challenge, as did its many types of building and maintenance on the site."

His colleague, SGS Auditor Christine Nichol, says: "Everything went smoothly thanks to the University's openness in allowing access to buildings, documentation and staff."

The University of Portsmouth's Charles Joly says: "At every stage [including the key pre-audit, stage 1 readiness review and stage 2 assessment] we were pleased with the SGS auditor's approach, which was always sensitive, tactful, pertinent and inclusive.

"Rather than being 'judged', in a way we felt more advised. We knew any findings would come out as non-conformities, but these were all discussed with SGS's auditor and the final report appeared almost as a neat to-do list for us, and provided a fresh eye on our work."

ISO 14001-BASED IMPROVEMENTS

As with other internationally recognised standards such as ISO 9001, ISO 14001 is based on a plan-do-check-act cycle of continual improvement.

The University of Portsmouth is using its ISO 14001-certified EMS to continually improve its processes, particularly in the core areas of waste and energy. It has already introduced more rigorous record-keeping, set up a waste management register and identified potentially large savings in the disposal of hazardous waste such as chemical and clinical waste.

The University is now working on a tender to combine all this waste into a single contract. This is intended to: reduce costs; improve the consistency of services received; and strengthen controls (through a documented internal audit trail, more clearly defined responsibilities and updated protocols). To boost energy efficiency, the University's new carbon management plan aims to reduce its CO2 emissions by 30% by August 2016 (using 2009–10 as a baseline).

Other waste management initiatives include a plan to introduce food-waste collection points and phase out general-waste bins, so cutting the amount of waste going to landfill.

BENEFITS OF CERTIFICATION

The University of Portsmouth's ISO 14001 certification is valid for the three years to 2015. During this period its certified EMS is subject to regular internal audits and external health-checks.

"ISO 14001 has acted as a motivator," says Charles Joly. "When we were recommended for certification, it felt like a great achievement and reward for our work."

"ISO 14001 certification is good for the University's image and reassures internal and external parties that we are in control of our operations and take all steps to reduce our environmental impact."

Within the organisation, the new EMS and ISO 14001 have raised the profile of environmental issues among staff.

"From the start we've involved personnel at all levels, from senior management to operational staff, for example in the building audits," says Charles Joly.

"This has brought people together who previously did not interact, creating new working relationships and making everyone aware of shared goals and the bigger picture.

"We were surprised to find that having an external auditor on site, and a certification at stake, 'opened doors' and motivated staff in a way that would have been difficult to achieve internally.

"ISO 14001 makes so much sense: it provides guidelines and a proven model for an EMS, saving the time and effort it would take to conceive a whole system from scratch."

Dr John Betts, SGS Auditor, says: "ISO 14001 will really help the University of Portsmouth to manage its environmental action plans for sustainable development, carbon reduction, biodiversity and sustainable travel."

ADVICE TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS

"Go for it!" says Charles Joly. "When it comes to ISO 14001, don't wait until everything is perfect: the aim of this assessment is to ensure your EMS is good enough to address your organisation's environmental impacts, not to be 'top of class' from day one."

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