

NEC Conference Report 2008

APPENDIX D: BECTU AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

BECTU's 2007 annual conference carried the following composite proposition:

Proposition 11/07 BECTU and the environment

That this annual conference recognises the importance that many companies and organisations are attaching to ethical environmental and energy-saving issues.

Conference instructs the NEC to undertake a 'green audit' to examine BECTU's credentials in this arena, focusing on paper usage and energy efficiency as examples, by asking members to receive mailings electronically where possible and without obligation or compulsion, and for head office to recycle more and use energy less. The NEC should monitor energy, paper and postage costs before and after the scheme and report these findings to conference 2008.

The Union Modernisation Fund Project Manager for BECTU, Rebecca Wingate-Saul, attended the TUC-organised Tolpuddle Green Camp on 11-15 July 2007. This provided valuable suggestions some of which have been incorporated in this paper. BECTU proposes to join the joint government (DEFRA) and TUC Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee. The TUSDAC has valuable links with key bodies such as the Carbon Trust, which has funded carbon-reduction projects at the TUC.

This paper

- (a) looks at the current position in BECTU;
- (b) proposes short-term improvements;
- (c) considers longer-term strategy.

The current position

(i) Recycling

BECTU has had a working relationship with Paper Round for over ten years. Paper Round was founded in 1989 by Friends of the Earth to provide ethical recycling services in the London area. It is now a successful standalone business with over 3,500 office clients. In 2006 it donated £12,000 to organisations such as Rainforest Concern and Friends of the Earth, and it plants a tree with Trees for Cities for each new client that joins.

BECTU started by recycling white paper with Paper Round. The following table shows the development of this service:

Year	Quantity recycled	Equivalent trees saved
1997	3.8 tonnes	57
1998	5.3 tonnes	80
1999	4.4 tonnes	66
2000	4,700 kg	71
2001	4,020 kg	68
2002	3,092 kg	53
2003	2,750 kg	47
2004	3,645 kg	62
2005	3,554 kg	60
2006	4,300 kg	67
2006	4,540 kg	73

As Paper Round's services have expanded, BECTU has also used the company to recycle other items including computer and IT equipment. Where it is not possible for BECTU to send usable equipment to sympathetic organisations in Cuba or Nicaragua via the union's Latin American Committee, Paper Round collects the equipment at a small cost per item. Computers in working order are wiped (using special software to US Department of Defense standards) and reformatted for shipping to developing countries. Dysfunctional or obsolete equipment is disassembled and the components are recycled or re-used. Paper Round is a registered waste carrier for the purposes of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations.

BECTU also uses Paper Round to recycle glass, printer cartridges, paper cups, and mixed paper (coloured and newspaper). Paper Round also provides a security shredding and recycling service, and this is used for paper containing sensitive personal, financial or membership information.

The London Borough of Lambeth will collect and recycle glass, cans, cardboard, paper and plastic bottles, but currently this is a free service designed for domestic addresses. The Council is looking at ways of offering a business recycling service. Fridges, cookers, washing machines and scrap metal are collected for recycling at a charge.

BECTU's journal *Stage Screen & Radio* is printed on paper produced from sustainable forests, and is sent out in biodegradable (compostible) polywrap wrappers.

Three mature trees were felled in 2007 in BECTU's rear grounds because they were alleged to be causing damage to the foundations of neighbouring properties on Atherfold Road. It was a condition of the tendering for this work that the arboriculturalists fully recycled the cuttings. Replacement planting is planned when the adjacent housing development works permit.

(i) Ethical consumer products

For over six years BECTU's head office has bought FairTrade instant coffee in preference to Nescafe or other brands.

(iii) Energy conservation

Where possible all light bulbs at head office are energy-saving long-life bulbs.

Short-term improvements

(i) Motivating staff

The Al Gore DVD *An Inconvenient Truth* should be obtained and either shown to staff collectively or lent to them individually. A questionnaire should be circulated to find out what staff think about environmental issues and to give them ownership of this initiative. The staff shops should be consulted.

(ii) Recycling

BECTU's head office previously used about 500 expanded polystyrene cups per week. These are not recyclable, and do not break down in landfill. They were used both by head office staff and by visitors (members attending meetings). Head office staff could be asked to use washable ceramic cups or mugs. These should be easily identifiable by owner/user so as to avoid the failure to wash up. They are not, however, practicable for use by members and visitors, and disposable cups will continue to be required for them. Biodegradable cups ('Ecotainers') were looked at, but at £75.10 per thousand were considered uneconomic. Hard-wall polystyrene cups can be recycled, and phasing out expanded polystyrene took place in the last quarter of 2007. The currently sourced hard-wall cups carry a Nescafe promotional design: plain hard-wall cups are being sought. Their environmental impact in landfill is much reduced, but, further, the cups are also washed out, collected in containers, and sent for recycling.

Consideration should be given to the re-use of white paper. Old letterheads and blank reverse sides can be used as scrap paper or for drafts.

Paper brought into the office by staff and members, including freesheets and newspapers, can be collected for recycling. A bin for these is in the head office entrance area.

(iii) Energy conservation

It should be ensured that staff are aware that at the change of season it is important that air conditioning and heating are not working simultaneously. Air conditioning works only when windows are closed.

It is acknowledged that the listed building status of BECTU's head office militates against PVCu double glazing and other modern energy conservation measures. The central heating system is poorly regulated by thermostats on individual radiators. It is not a viable option in the short term to build in local thermostatic controls. However, it should be established whether a timer can be fitted to the central heating boilers to turn them off at, say, 8pm, and on again at, say, 6am.

At present the cleaners' instructions are to leave lights on in the evening so that the staff and guards doing the lock-down can more easily check for open windows and for equipment and appliances left on. However, there is frequently a three-hour delay between the cleaners' rounds and the lock-down. The cleaners should be asked to switch off office lights once the room has been cleaned. This will also help in establishing that no-

one is still working in an office at lock-down time.

All staff should be instructed to switch off computer equipment when they leave work at the end of the day (unless it is providing a continuous service such as a server). In particular monitors should be switched off rather than be allowed to go into stand-by mode (this includes televisions).

Wall sockets should be switched off when not in use.

(iv) Non-paper communication

Committees should be encouraged to ask their members to opt to receive documents in electronic formats instead of hard copy. The use of bulk e-mail should be expanded, though limitations on the widespread use of employer-owned domains needs to be kept in mind.

Divisional mailings should, as far as possible, be consolidated in one mailing a week.

The expanded use of web tools is under consideration by the union's Communications Committee, and will be enabled by the new SodalitaS database and e-Services.

(v) Travel

Consideration should be given to the 'Bike for All' tax-free loan initiative to increase bicycle ownership and use. Appropriate head office cycle storage facilities will be needed, and this needs to be kept in mind during the redevelopment work to the rear of the Clapham Road building.

Video-conferencing should be explored as a means of reducing the need for members to travel to meetings.

The selection of meeting venues (including annual conference) should keep in mind the need to minimise air travel. On-line calculators such as the one on the Trees for Cities website can be used to establish how many trees per air journey are required to compensate for the carbon emissions. The site also allows easy purchasing of tree planting and other forms of carbon-offsetting.

(v) Ethical purchasing

Checks should be made to ensure that products, including promotional merchandise, are ethically and sustainably produced.

Longer term strategy

A full 'green audit' should be conducted, using the 'Carbon Smart' template. This is currently quoted at £3000+VAT. Carbon Smart is a carbon reduction consultancy associated with Paper Round. Its service is designed for small and medium sized enterprises. A calculator tool is provided which weighs energy bills, building size, the number of employees and paper consumption. This calculates how many tonnes of CO₂ the organisation produces, and reviews the 'waste stream' and suppliers of services and consumables. The organisation can then be rated against similar ones in line with standard industry benchmarks. The assessment may lead to switching to a green energy

tariff. Remaining CO₂ emissions are then offset by tree planting through Trees for Cities or investment in low- or no-carbon technology projects. Completion of the assessment entitles the organisation to use the Carbon Smart logo on its letterhead, and Carbon Smart can also offer ideas for extending the environmental ethos to 'customers, staff and shareholders', which in our case would mean branches and employers.

When measures are established and sustained, consideration should be given to seeking accreditation under ISO 14001. We understand Unison and PCS are already signed up to the Standard.

Adopting environmental objectives as a collective bargaining issue with employers should follow putting our own house in order first.

We recommend that these proposals are carried forward into any joint BECTU-NUJ property project (when they can be implemented at planning stage with advantage). If that project does not proceed they should be implemented in any case.

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