

Eco-My-Flat Summary Report

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1. Background

In 2007-2008 three summer scholarship students, Lily Duval, Erin Martin and Josie Howitt, created a student competition they called 'eco-my-flat', a word play on the TV show 'Pimp-My-Ride'. The aim of the competition was to 'encourage student flats to make their flats more eco-friendly and to raise awareness of sustainability related issues amongst the wider student community' (Anthony Field, 'Eco-My-Flat Final Report', 2008). The competition involved initial and final flat audits, four workshops, and regular blogs from the competitors. The workshops were skilfully handled by environmental educator Paul de Spa, and the blogs reflected genuine sustainable living changes in the participating flats. The competition concluded after six weeks with an award ceremony at a central Christchurch bar where the winners received prizes, including a trip away to the Caitlins.

Thirty-four flats signed up to the competition. The final report from the competition's two coordinators, Mathew Whiting and Anthony Field, concluded that the 'competition was a huge success for its first year. The number of flats actively participating did drop off during the competition but those who dropped off were those less into it and the best remained. There was a lot of enthusiasm shown and much achieved by those flats actively participating throughout the competition' (Field, 2008). There was some good media exposure which further promoted the sustainable living concept into the wider community, showing that anyone can do it.

The competition was considered such a success that it was exported the following year to Lincoln University and while the University of Canterbury handled the coordination one of the final winners was a Lincoln flat. Again, in 2009 about thirty flats participated and with a few minor modifications (and a lot more prizes) the basic structure of the competition remained the same.

In 2010, however, some major changes to the competition were introduced. These changes were introduced recognising that: the competition had directly promoted genuine behaviour change to a relatively small number of students (say 100 per year out of the student population each year of 20,000); that the short duration of the competition put too much pressure on coordination while at the same time meant changed practices were not necessarily bedded in; and third, that competitions can sometimes erode 'intrinsic motivations' (i.e. values) to change behaviours by focussing on 'extrinsic motivators' (i.e. prizes) (Rosemary Black, 2009:38). Furthermore, while there were definitely community building outcomes – where flats had joined together for shared meals, or individual flatmates had talked with neighbours about sharing resources – it was felt that a lot more could be gained in this area.

The changes that were introduced, therefore, were: first, to make the competition a component of a larger, year long sustainable living programme; second, to extend the competition period out to two terms instead of one (i.e. to three months);, and third, to create a space in the second semester for on-going support and development in a non-competitive, empowering setting. Regarding the community building aspect, participants were strongly urged to do some kind of community project. We also put even more effort into the prizes, which included package holidays to Kaikoura and Geraldine for winning flats, along with free giveaways for every workshop valued at over \$100 in total.

These changes did not result in an increased participation rate. Twenty-six flats signed up to the competition, but many of these did not end up participating. About twenty flats participated to varying extents with eleven being clear contenders at the end of the competition. We suspect that the longer duration (and increased potential therefore for clashes with assignments) was the prime reason for this. However, we believe that the longer duration produced much better results for those who made it through to the end.

2. Evaluation Methods

Different evaluation methods have been used for each of the three years the competition has been held.

2.1 Flat Audits

In the first year, initial and final flat audits were the only data recorded, showing clearly that the competition had a good positive effect on the students involved. These audits were continued in 2009 and 2010. In 2009 only the initial audits were conducted and in 2010, while both the initial and final audits were conducted, the audit forms were amended considerably.

2.2 Participant Surveys

Participant Surveys were conducted at the end of the competition in both 2009 and 2010. The response rate was very low in 2009, with only six replies. In this case, each reply was written on behalf of a participating flat. In 2010 the surveys received 33 replies, which is approximately a 33% response rate if all the initial sign-ups are counted, and an approximately 60% response rate if only the finalists are counted. Either way it provides a robust sample. The 2010 surveys were completed on behalf of the individuals filling out the forms (i.e. not on behalf of a single flat). Comparisons between the two years should be treated with caution.

2.3 Most Significant Change method, using Participatory Video

This method was used in the 2010 competition. Information on this method is detailed in the report compiled for the Sustainability Office by SociFoci. Essentially, six flats made two short videos about the most significant changes they saw as a flat coming out of the eco-my-flat competition. This process also involved a social gathering to review the videos, an event that included a further opportunity for participants to say what worked well and what could be improved.

2.4 Sign-Up Forms

The sign-up forms completed by flats at the outset of the competition collected data on flat details as well as motivations for participating in the competition. Some of this information has been used to help us understand who feels compelled to sign up and why. Should we include years in this?

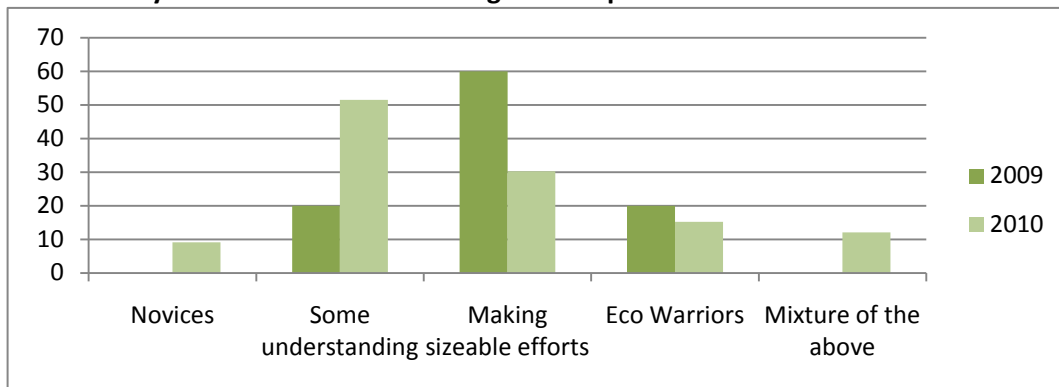
3. Research Findings

3.1 Who participates and how do they hear about the competition?

We have not collected data relating to age, sex, ethnicity, degree programme or level of study to date. However, our observations are that there is a fairly equal split between males and females, and a spread of ages from first year through to PhD. Most participants have been New Zealand Pakeha, with a very low level of participation from Maori and Pacifica students.

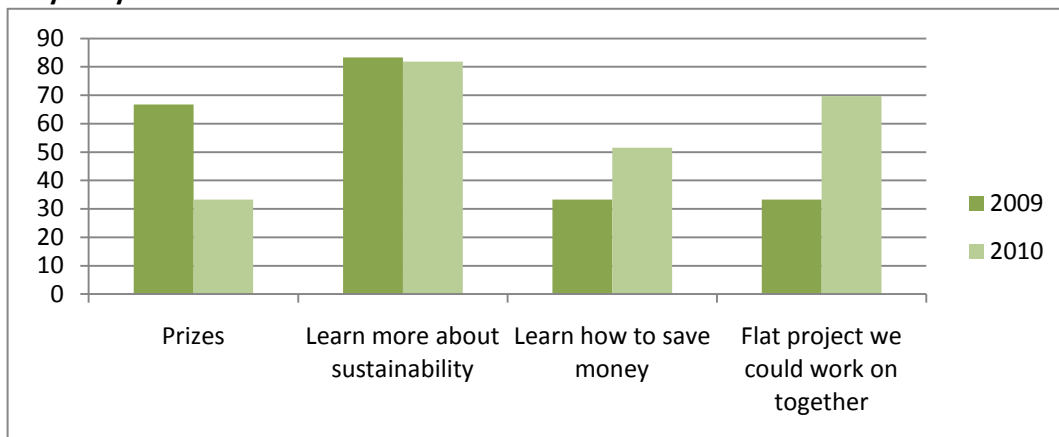
We asked the participants how they considered their flat on entering the competition in terms of sustainable practices. They ranked themselves from ‘novices’ to ‘keen eco warriors’, and we found in 2009 that most thought they were already making sizeable efforts, while in 2010 most simply had some understanding of the issues and a desire to learn more.

How would you describe flat on entering the competition?



When we asked why the participants entered the competition, it was this desire to learn more about sustainability that was underscored. In 2010 ‘prizes’ was the least important reason flats signed up; most wanted to learn more about sustainability. This is extremely interesting given the value of the prizes had increased markedly, *and* they were far better publicised. The same category had been the most important reason in 2009. We also noted a strong interest from flats in having a project they could all work on together as a flat.

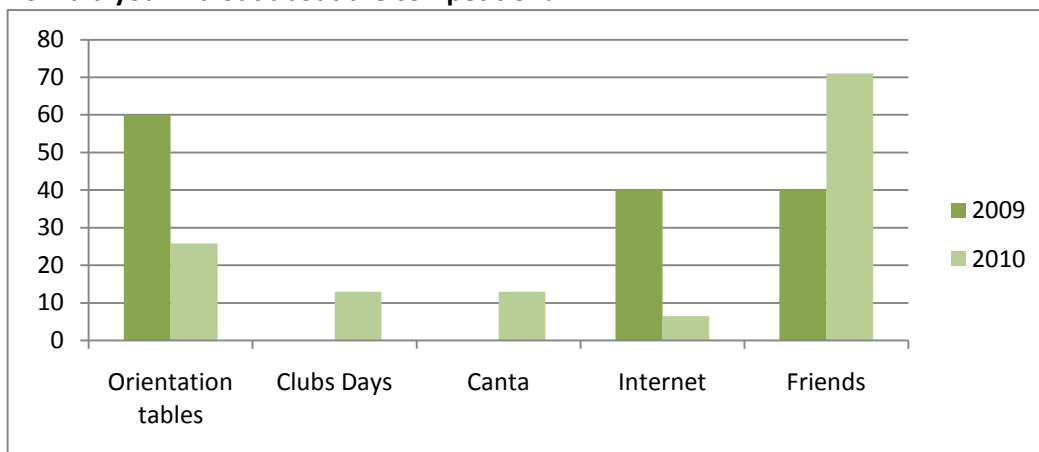
Why did your flat enter?



In terms of how the Sustainability Office uses its resources for attracting flats to the competition, it was particularly important for us to find out how they found out about it. Considerable resources went into creating a stand for Orientation, a table at Clubs Days, as well as professionally designed posters and flyers (in 2010), and writing articles for the student magazine *Canta* and the Orientation magazine. We noted that in 2009, 60% of the participants who completed surveys found out about eco-my-flat at Orientation, while in 2010 we were surprised to see that over 70% found out about the competition through their friends.

This result leaves us wondering about how those friends found out about the competition, but we suspect that some of them had participated in an earlier year and we know that several of them had become involved with the Sustainability Office over the summer via the sustainability scholarship programme. This result has led us to put more effort into social media (Facebook) and focussing on supporting the 'eco-my-flat community' with social events. We did find that at Orientation in 2010 numbers of students coming through were less than in previous years due to the advent of on-line enrolments, which certainly had an effect.

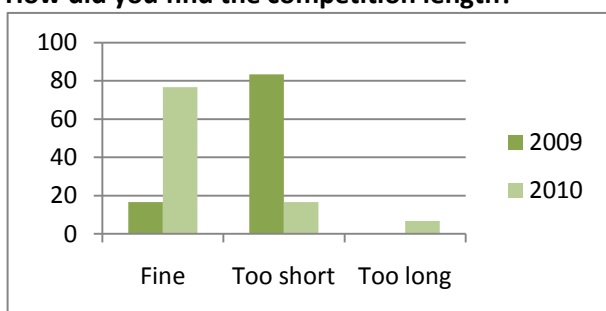
How did you find out about the competition?



3.2 Competition Mechanics: Duration, Workshops and Audits

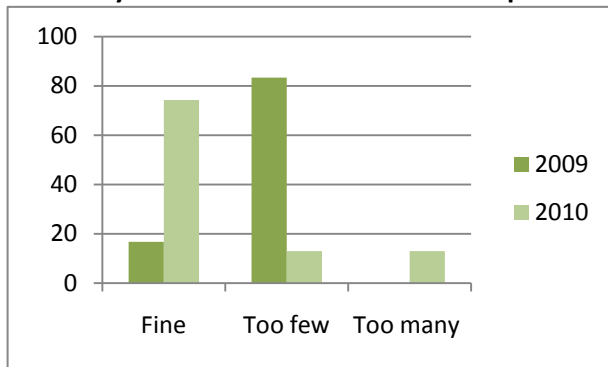
In 2008 the competition organisers reported that they felt the one-term duration was too short. In 2009 over 80% of respondents told us that the duration of the competition (one month) was too short and they wanted it to run for longer. In 2010 we ran it for two terms (three months) and tripled the number of workshops we ran. As a result, 76.7% of respondents felt the competition length was now correct.

How did you find the competition length?



In 2008 we ran four two hour workshops and in 2009 we ran three two hour workshops. In 2010 we ran nine one hour workshops, which meant we could offer them over the lunch breaks for general staff as well (advertised separately as 'eco-living' workshops). Again, whereas in 2009 we were told there were too few workshops, in 2010 we were told that nine was about right by 74.2%. However, a sizeable number (over 12%) believed both that there were too many and too few workshops.

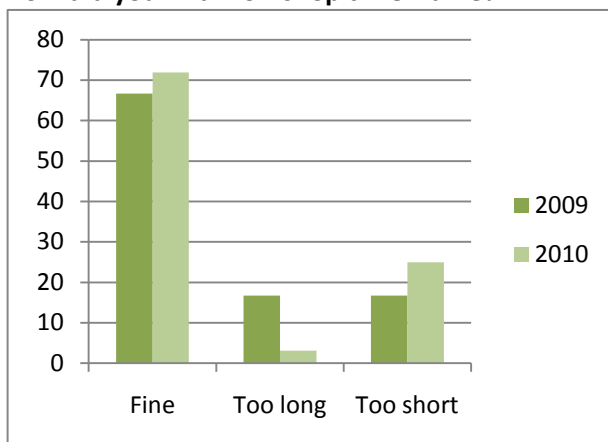
How did you find the number of workshops?



In further discussions with the participants, we think this means that they believed that some topics needed longer than one hour to cover, while others could have been dealt with in a shorter time-frame. Overall, the 2009 participants were satisfied with two hour workshops, but 71.9% believed that one hour workshops were fine in 2010. We also noticed that the final workshop in 2010 had a low attendance as it clashed with end of semester exam preparation (even though it was held at least a week before the end of term).

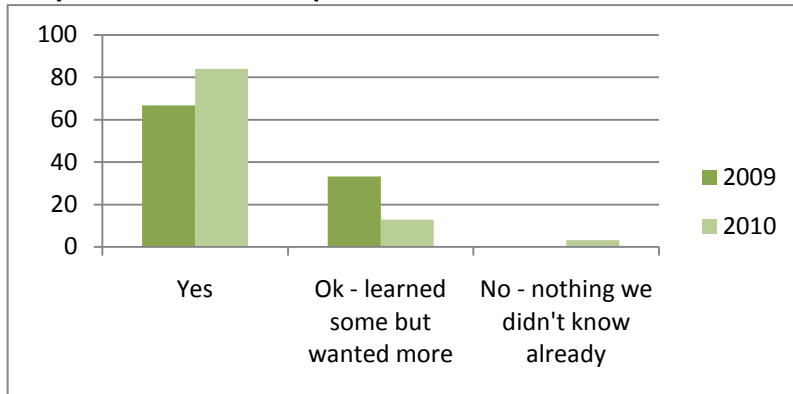
In 2011 we will consider reorganising the workshops so that a) there are only eight (finishing earlier in the second term), b) that the evening workshops either start earlier or later (not at 6pm), and c) that the topics are revisited. Feedback in 2009 and at the eco-my-flat social event in July 2010 suggested new topics for us to consider running workshops on. For example, in 2010 we broadened the topics out from energy, transport and gardening to include brewing, preserving, op-shopping, body care and household cleaning. We received a lot of feedback from people in 2010 saying they wanted the workshops to be more hands-on, which we are taking into account.

How did you find workshop time frame?



Overall the workshops were well-received, with most people (66.7% in 2009 and 83.9% in 2010) saying they found them to be useful.

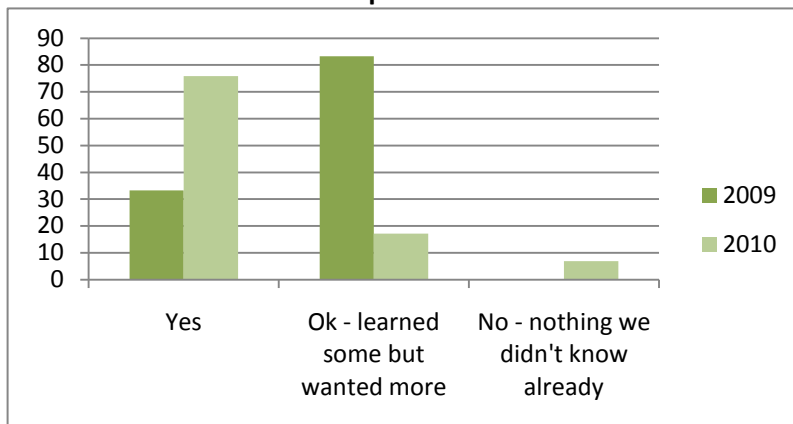
Did you find the workshop information useful?



At the beginning of the competition each flat was audited. This was an opportunity to collect some data about sustainable practices, which was then used in the final judging assessment, but it was also an opportunity for one-on-one, in situ discussion about sustainable living. This was an essential component of the competition especially in 2008. 'Auditing the flats was an important part of the competition. It provided personal contact with the competitors and was a major part of the judging. The initial audit also gave us a feel for the level of knowledge the flats had and helped us shape the competition' (Field, 2008).

Feedback received in 2009 was that while the audits were well received, participants wanted more detailed information. The audit form was altered prior to the 2010 audits by Dr Sharon McIver, who had carried out the 2009 audits using the original forms, and the results showed that they were markedly more successful as an opportunity for information dissemination.

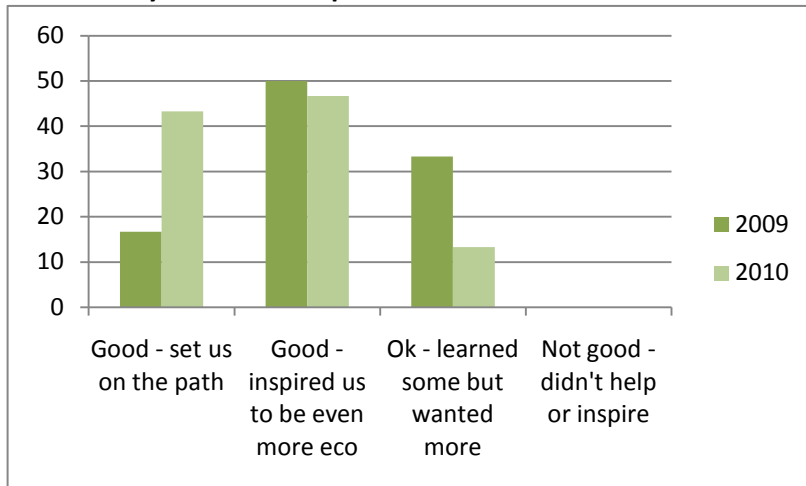
Were the initial flat audits helpful?



3.3 Success of the Competition as a Behaviour Change Programme

Eco-my-flat was clearly a success in its first year. 'There was a lot of enthusiasm shown and much achieved by those flats actively participating throughout the competition' (Field, 2008). We asked the participants about their overall impressions of the competition in 2009 and 2010, and the result was generally favourable. Participants felt inspired to make more of an effort to live sustainable lives. We were especially pleased to see that in 2010 the number of people who felt that the competition had helped set them on the path to sustainable living had increased considerably, from under 17% to over 43%. We attribute this to the greater range of topics discussed, but also to the longer timeframe which meant there was a much greater opportunity for sustainable behaviours to be bedded in, and supported by peers and the competition organisers.

What were your overall impressions?



The results of the flat audits and what the students wrote in their blogs are the best way to determine the extent of the changes they made as a result of their participation. For each of the first three years it is clear from both these sources that changes did occur and, in 2010 we were able to gauge to a better extent what the on-going effects were.

A small selection of these blogs helps show the sorts of things the flatters worked on:

“Power showers have been instigated. Each shower must be the length of 1 song. No extended rock ballads (or Enya)” (Avonhead Eco-Warriors, 2008)

“Have finally got the last one of our ‘special projects’ on the move (will reveal the others soon). Have started manufacturing our own bio-fuel with almost all the ‘advanced’ equipment (eg. old rubber hose and a bucket) recycled from around our flat and Supershed. Our intention is to be able to mow our lawn on a 50:50 mix of fuel before the end of the month.” (The Bunker, 2008)

“...on the energy front, we adjusted our hot water thermostat and got a cent-a-meter, which allows us to monitor our power usage. Check out www.centameter.co.nz. The centameter is allowing us to get a feeling for which appliances use more and less power and it also reminds us to switch our lights off when we can see the money going down the drain. We’ve found that the oven is one of the worst culprits using around 40 cents an hour, however a computer left on permanently can use about \$27 per month...” (Westgrove Wasters, 2008)

“... at the start of this comp I was pretty much the only person who was excited about it, but now the boys always put me to shame with their eco achievements. Rob and Shaun built us the BEST worm farm ever!! Rob has been doing crazy amounts of research into new ecoing ideas for our flat and figuring out how to actually implement them... Alistair has been foraging with more skills than a wild animal... and feeding us on yummy, foraged desserts while instilling into us the dangers of excess packaging.” (The Lotus Garden, 2009)

“Our garden is looking mighty fine and increasingly delicious, the Cruiser is functional, our household products gentle and natural, reusable packaging for shopping and storage, waste reduced, and many other things.” (Winkle’s Lair, 2009)

“I have been using a little baking soda to wash my hair, rinsing with vinegar... and so have finally eliminated chemicals from my personal cleaning (previous to this I used eco-store soaps and apricot oil for moisturiser, and I don’t wear make up). We have been using soap nuts in the washing machine, along with a little baking soda, and this has been working really well. It is quite satisfying to think that although we aren’t set up to collect and reuse the grey water from the washing machine, we aren’t adding to the cacophony of chemicals going down the drain.” (Pri-uta, 2009)

“I guess the biggest achievement of this competition for us has been a mental one; we have been able to hugely increase our knowledge and awareness of all the aspects of eco-friendliness, and the workshops (and also reading other flats blogs) has tremendously increased our capacity of putting this knowledge into practice.” (Spider Cottage, 2010)

“The garden has been a massive transformation, with a large section converted from weed mat covered in bark to a lovely vege garden that has already provided us with yummy stuff to eat. At the moment our vege garden boasts silverbeet, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, spring onions, leeks, radishes, carrots, pak choi, rocket, buttercrunch lettuce, mesclum mix, coriander, thyme, chives, rosemary, mint, and rhubarb... We’ve had an amazing amount of help from our families on this one. It’s been a really big adventure on our part. And we are super stoked to be growing our own things.” (Frew Frew Flat, 2010)

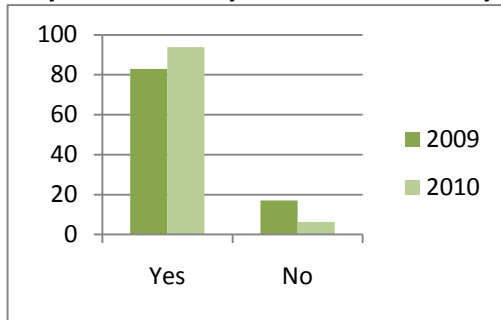
“The cider’s been ‘maturing’ in some Super Shed sourced bottles for just over a week now, and it’s settling very well, and hopefully getting quite fizzy. I’m very, very exciting about cracking one open come the Earth Night celebration. I thought it would be cool to make eco labels for all the bottles. So I nabbed some unwanted print-outs from the library and stained them with tea and dried them in the oven to get rid of that office whiteness. I... carved a wood-block print from some wood I found in the garage, just using a hammer and chisel and a file for the detail. I also didn’t want to use bought paint, because I reckon it’s probably full of some pretty nasty chemicals. So I made my own dye by boiling up beetroot and adding some flour... to make a vibrant red paint.” (Tauawhi, 2010)

Above all, we wanted to know whether the competition had actually generated real behaviour change and we saw, especially through the blogs, that this was the case. The audits gave a more concise snapshot that reinforced this picture. Apart from what the flatmates related to the auditor, the auditor was able to observe certain kinds of changes that could not be faked. These included new gardens, compost bins, eco light bulbs and other additions like a glasshouse, wind turbine and grey water recycling system. We conclude that eco-my-flat creates genuine change towards sustainable practices.

3.4 Eco-My-Flat as a Means to Build a ‘Sustainability Community’

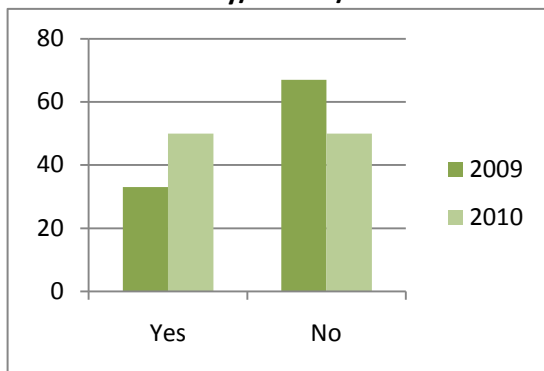
We also wanted to gauge what on-going effects might come from it. Overwhelmingly, participants noted that the competition had definitely influenced their lifestyle. 83% reported this in 2009, and this jumped to 93% in the much more representative sample of 2010.

Do you feel eco-my-flat has influenced your lifestyle?



Similarly, we noted an increase in 2010 in the number of people who felt that their experiences in eco-my-flat had had an influence on their families, friends and whanau. This had increased from one third to half. While there is room for improvement here, this demonstrates vividly the power of this competition to have effects well beyond the people directly participating.

Influence on family/friends/whanau?

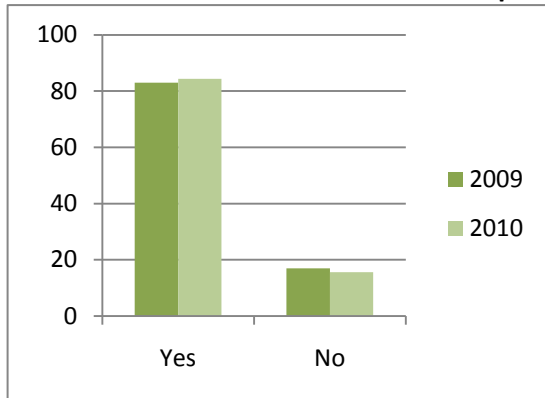


When we asked whether the competition had led to participants discussing sustainability issues more with others, we saw that it definitely had in both 2009 and 2010 (83% and 84.4% respectively). In the informal discussions from the July 2010 social gathering we heard that the whole structure of the competition supported individuals to feel more confident about communicating their thoughts on sustainable living with others, contributing to the development of the wider sustainability discourse. It is important to note that the competition winners wrote an article on their experiences for *Canta*, appeared in local and national media and spoke at the Eco Expo in Christchurch about eco-my-flat and what they had learned, again emphasising the ripple effect of the competition.

Furthermore, while the flatters wrote 20,000 words of blogs in 2008 (Field, 2008), in 2010 they wrote in excess of 50,000 words. While this is understandable given the longer duration, the point is that this shows how much more engaged participants were when there was more time. The blogs themselves were very rich not just in documenting changed behaviours, but in sharing research as well as recipes, building instructions, and places to forage for fruit and nuts. Blogging got the students used to the idea of sharing their knowledge (as did the workshops to a lesser extent), and almost certainly contributed to their willingness to talk to others in person about sustainable living.

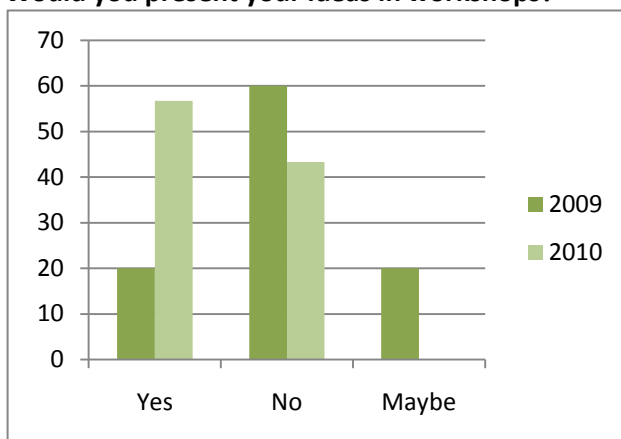
The blogs, furthermore, remain on-line as a resource for others. In 2010 much of the information, and some direct quotations, from the 2009 blogs were used as the basis for an eco-my-flat booklet featuring in situ photos of the flatters. There is scope for making further use of the blog material.

More discussion with others as result of participating?



To really make this point, however, we asked participants if they would be prepared to share what they had learned with other students in a workshop setting. We noted a considerable jump between 2009 and 2010 from 20% saying yes in 2009 to 56.7% in 2010. Again, this is attributed to the longer duration of the competition and the sense of community that developed amongst the participants. This gave more opportunity for research, reflection, experimentation and discussion.

Would you present your ideas in workshops?



In both 2009 and 2010 100% of those surveyed said they would recommend eco-my-flat to their friends if it was to run again, which is both a strong vote of confidence and very useful given the high proportion of participants who heard about the competition through their friends. It is important to remember, however, that those surveyed were primarily people who continued with the competition through to its completion. There is still a need a) to increase the numbers of participants and b) to retain more of the initial sign-ups than we managed in 2010.

Recommendations

Length of the competition:

- Maintain the two-term structure of the competition

Audits:

- Maintain the current audit sheets
- Review the reporting mechanism. Currently it is difficult to clearly analyse behaviour changes either from individual or aggregated flats

Workshops:

- Ensure that the workshops are more practical and hands-on
- Run eight rather than nine workshops, so that they finish earlier and don't clash with end-of-semester assessments
- Maintain the one-hour timeframe, but review the topics.

Blog:

- Maintain the blog as an essential component of the competition
- Review blog hosting and processes. Students would like more control of how and when their blogs are posted, and the organisers need the ability to modify posts as required

Community-building:

- Flats wanted more organised inter-flat events and opportunities. Consider mid-competition get-together
- Reconsider venue for Earth Night/ Prize-giving. Somewhere smaller

Promotion/Marketing:

- Distribute posters through UCSA and ensure that Phantom won't cover them over
- Make more mention of free give-aways at workshops
- Make more use of social media (Facebook) to promote the competition
- Review position of stall at Orientation if possible – more visible space
- Hold 'sustainability community' events during Orientation Week, perhaps as part of the whole programme, and use these to actively (rather than passively) promote eco-my-flat
- Distribute the eco-my-flats through relevant cafes

Retention of flats:

- Ensure that at the first workshop we collect email addresses of all attendees
- If flats appear to have dropped out, contact them by phone

Monitoring:

- Refer to the Social Foci recommendations in *Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the UC Sustainability Office*