



Students' Union or Association name: Reading Students' Union

Case Study Title: Uni Bikes - Bike Hire scheme

Please introduce your case study (2-3 sentences):

The Uni Bike hire scheme is a joint project run by Reading SU and the University. Now entering its tenth year, the scheme started out as a way to reduce the number of bikes being abandoned on campus by international students and provide an alternative to buying a bike for students wanting to cycle.

Context

In 2014/15, together with the University, Reading Students' Union set up what is now known as the Uni Bike hire scheme (originally Uni Cycle). The University [Sustainability team](#) approached the SU as they were getting a large amount of bicycles abandoned each year, both on campus and at the surrounding halls of residence. This was attributed to lots of international students that were buying bikes for their time here but being unable to sell them before going home and simply leaving them.

The University did not have the means or resource to do anything with these except dispose of them but together with the SU and their Sustainability Officer responsible for cycling, a plan was formed. An agreement with Campus Security was made that allowed the abandoned bicycles they collected each summer would be made available to the new project before being disposed of. An initial budget for a local bike mechanic was provided by the University to kick start the 'fleet' of second hand bikes and each bike was selected based on minimal (£30) cost to get it road worthy, mainly that it only required new brake pads, cables and maybe a new chain. Each bike was also given a service so that it was good to be used. The initial budget also facilitated the purchase of locks and lights for each bike.

A deposit system (£20) and hire fee for the academic year (£30) was put in place by the SU and SU staff took on the running and facilitation of the scheme, focusing mainly on the Welcome week period. Deposits and hire fees were reasonably low to encourage use of the scheme but enough cover costs of the ongoing maintenance of the bikes or their loss should they not be returned. We amended the scheme to allow students to hire for just a term (310) as a lot of feedback was from Erasmus students only here between September and January.

Since then the scheme has continued to operate, even during Covid, albeit at a lower rate than normal. The number of bikes being left on campus drastically reduced fairly quickly which was the main aim and meant the project had been a success. However, that did mean that the number of bikes available started to dwindle as the used bikes became less financially viable to maintain and there were fewer on campus left to choose from each summer. There were also more students enquiring about the project and expressing interest in hiring a bike.

In 2018/19, a fleet of 36 second hand Raleigh Pioneer hybrid bikes was purchased by Reading SU to boost the number of bikes available. These were purchased via the local bike mechanic,

Dr Bike, who had links to Thames Valley Business Park in the local area. Their fleet of bikes were being underused and was surplus to requirements. As these were much nicer bikes, a higher deposit was asked for them (£100) and also higher fees (£80 a year, £40 a term). Over the interim years, this fleet has dwindled, mainly due to thefts/non returns, but there are still over 20 of them in action.

Dr Bike sessions are organised by the University's sustainability team every Wednesday afternoon during semester time and from 2022 are now run by volunteers from the Reading Bike Kitchen local charity (RBK) and help from Avanti Cycling, a local training provider, as the original Dr Bike retired. These offer students and staff the facility to have their bikes checked over free of charge and where needed, things tightened up, oiled, lubricated etc. RBK will also offer quick repairs/replacements for low cost such as new brake pads and cables etc. Through RBK and Avanti there have also been additional second hand bikes supplied to again boost the number available.

Hire bike numbers

2014.15 - 37 bikes

2015.16 - 27 bikes

2016.17 - 28 bikes

2017.18 - 24 bikes

2018.19 - 72 bikes (inc the 36 Raleigh Pioneers)

2019.20 - 58 bikes

2020.21 - 32 bikes (University staff changed and Dr Bike retired so we only had the Raleigh Fleet)

2021.22 - 24 bikes (Covid)

2022.23 - 43 bikes (additional second hand bikes via RBK and Avanti)

2023.24 - 66 bikes (additional second hand bikes via RBK and Avanti)

2024.25 - 47 bikes currently

A summary of your achievements

This project has stopped bikes left over campus being thrown away and repurposed, giving other students the chance to cycle to and from campus rather than relying on public transport. It has strengthened relations with University departments, particularly the

Evaluating the impact of your project

The initial number of bikes hired was 37, made up from purely bikes that had been left on campus. That number came down each year due to there being fewer bikes left/abandoned on campus and at halls; which was the overall aim of the project. By 20.21, 21.22, we only had the Raleigh fleet bikes. When RBK and Avanti came on board, we were able to get additional second hand bikes from them.

Students and colleagues are very supportive of the scheme and there is often surplus demand for bikes as it's such an affordable option for students.

Challenges and Opportunities

Initial barriers were getting campus security and the university legal team to allow us to access the collected bikes. Abandoned bikes were labelled and checked by security over a set period of time before being removed to a central store. A further allotted time then had to pass before we could view them for suitability to add to the scheme.

Following that, storage has always been an issue for the bikes as a large enough and secure store area was difficult to locate, especially for the summer months when most bikes were returned. We were able to secure 2 old garages the university identified for us and some additional storage under an academic building. Logistically, it is still a problem as the bikes have to be brought to central campus for students to see. However, bikes are now also hired out over the summer to visiting staff/post grad students which has reduced storage needs. Students are also asked to give their height when paying their deposit so that a suitable selection of bikes can be brought out each week for those hiring, rather than the full fleet.

Value-added benefits

As the scheme has developed, students are now offered free cycle training from Avanti Cycling as part of the hire fee. This is especially useful (and sensible) for international students that are not used to UK roads, laws and our highway code. Another great benefit that has come from the popularity of this project is the weekly Dr Bike sessions during term/semester time. These were initially only funded by the university to happen once a month but now happen every Wednesday afternoon 12-2pm.

Legacy

We hope to keep this project going as long as possible, providing affordable, sustainable travel options for students. The knowledge gained by students each year also feeds into the legacy, whether through the cycling lessons, tips from Dr. Bike or safety resources from Thames Valley Police when they come to tag the bikes.

The fleet of bikes has reached a stable number so hopefully this can continue encouraging behaviour change going forward.

Resourcing

Costs are largely covered by the deposits and hire fees and when it costs more than this to repair a bike it is recycled instead of being fixed. Staff time is minimal; deposits are sorted through the website and deposit returns are handled by our Welcome Team. Staff time is needed to check bikes and add to the fleet

Photos



Unicycle bike hire

£40 per term or £80 per year plus a £100 deposit
(includes lock and lights)

A stylized illustration of a teal bicycle with a white basket on the handlebars. The bicycle is positioned on a light blue wavy line that represents a path or ground. The background is a solid green color.

Reading Students' Union

