

## OPEN ACCESS

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# Greening chemical engineering laboratory at Bradford University

I.M. Mujtaba<sup>1,\*</sup>, R. Patel<sup>1</sup>, N. Karodia<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>School of Engineering, University of Bradford, Bradford BD7 1DP, UK<sup>2</sup>School of Life Science, University of Bradford, Bradford BD7 1DP, UK

\*Email: I.M.Mujtaba@bradford.ac.uk

**ABSTRACT**

This paper highlights the work undertaken to assess the current state of the art of the Chemical Engineering Laboratory at the University of Bradford (UK) in terms of total energy and water usage and sound pollution and to propose an action plan to 'greening' the laboratory so that future students are trained in a laboratory where sustainability is the key feature of all learning activities. The project was funded by National Higher Education STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) Programme. This review and assessment was carried out by two academic staff and one technical staff member with chemical engineering background.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Water and energy contribute immensely to the quality life and go hand in hand. Our health and wellbeing (food, accommodation, medicine, and transports) determine our quality of life and require sustainable and steady water and energy supplies. The world's population is predicted to increase exponentially and the desire to have improved standards of living, together with increased water pollution due to industrial use of water, is increasing the water and energy demand. These factors are putting severe strain on the quantity of available freshwater and energy sources.

In addition, global warming is one of the most serious challenges facing us today. To protect the health and economic well-being of current and future generations, we must reduce our emissions (carbon footprint), make use of alternative sources (renewable) of energy, reclaim and reuse water.

Science and engineering plays a vital and increasing role in meeting the current and future needs of both Society and the planet Earth: from carbon capture to sustainable energy generation and from water supply to waste management by developing new technology, know-how, and practical solutions. Meeting the exponentially growing water and energy demands and securing sustainable energy and water supplies are important challenges for scientists and engineers today.

Experimenting with a number of unit operations is a fundamental part of the chemical engineering curriculum at Bradford where the students get hands on experience with many pieces of equipment such as distillation, reactor, absorption, water treatment, desalination, cooling tower, etc. Although ethics and sustainability concepts are built in the curriculum and are part of almost every module of the course, the unit operation labs provide great opportunities to embed and extend the concept of sustainability, especially in terms of energy and water usage, environmental pollution, etc.

Most recently, The University of Bradford (UK) has been resourced by Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) funding to undertake a technical audit of the chemical engineering laboratory, within the School of Engineering with an ultimate objective of **greening the laboratory** so that energy and water usages and environmental pollution (carbon foot print) are reduced. This paper highlights the unit operations where there are opportunities for such reduction. From last academic year the students, during laboratory experiments, were motivated to consider/think of possible reduction in water, energy and pollution in each experiment. The ultimate idea is to develop a Green Matrix for Chemical engineering laboratory and to share that with IChemE and other UK HEIs (those providing chemical engineering courses) as well as designers of these laboratory equipment.

## 2. CHEMICAL ENGINEERING CURRICULUM AT BRADFORD

The distinctive feature of the course at Bradford is a traditional chemical engineering (oil, gas and petrochemical) but with a particular focus in advanced materials engineering (based on our excellent research in polymer processing and technology). The Bradford curriculum is aimed at developing a deep understanding of fundamental and advanced technical principles, analytical tools, and competence in their application together with a wide range of management, personal and professional skills. The course provides our graduates with essential tools based on the concept of sustainability and low carbon footprint for changing raw materials into useful products in a safe and cost effective way, and that is reflected in the final year design project. At MEng level our graduates have further choice of specialisation in Food and Pharmaceutical Engineering, Desalination Technology and Sustainable Energy Systems.

Table 1 shows the current 4 years MEng programme specification for Chemical Engineering at Bradford.

The IChemE has published a *Technical Roadmap for 21<sup>st</sup> century chemical engineering* ([www.icheme.org/TechnicalRoadmap](http://www.icheme.org/TechnicalRoadmap)). This broad ranging publication highlights six issue areas of critical global importance where chemical engineers will have enormous influence: (a) health, safety, environment, (b) sustainable technology (c) energy (d) food and drink (e) water (f) biosystems. Table 2 shows the relevant modules addressing some of the above issues identified in the Technical Roadmap.

## 3. ENERGY, WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

Year 2 and Year 3 students attend two laboratory modules named Chemical Engineering Practice-1 and Chemical Engineering Practice-2 where they experiment with a number of unit operations (Table 3).

**Table 1. Chemical Engineering Curriculum at Bradford.**

<b>Year 1 Modules</b>	<b>Year 2 Modules</b>
Introduction to Chemical Engineering Engineering Analysis Materials Technology Essentials of Chemical Structure, Bonding and Reactivity Introduction to Chemical Thermodynamics Cell and Microbiology for Engineers Fluid Mechanics 1 Laboratory Practice and Professional Skills 2 Introduction to CAD and Flow Sheeting Health and Safety Management	Further Engineering Analysis Thermodynamics Fluid Mechanics 2 Technology Operations Management Chemical Engineering Practice - 1 Structure and Solid Modelling Separation Processes Engineering Introductory Control Computer Modelling Techniques Process Design Engineering Statistics Petroleum Product Engineering-1
<b>Year 3 Modules*</b>	<b>Year 4 Modules*</b>
Chemical Engineering Practice - 2 Design Project (Chemical Engineering) Design Project (Petroleum Engineering) Design Project (Pharmaceutical Engineering) Materials Failure Analysis Reaction Engineering Petroleum Product Engineering-2 Six Sigma for Business Excellence Advanced Control Robotics Systems Reliability Engineering	Transport Process Modelling Advanced Research Project Polymer Engineering Upstream Production Operation Desalination Technology Sustainable Energy Food and Pharmaceutical Process Engineering Refinery Operation Finite Element Methods Risk Management

\* Students studying up to Year 3 obtain BEng degree. Students studying up to Year 4 obtain MEng degree.

**Table 2. Core Modules Addressing IChemE's Technical Roadmap.**

<b>Sustainable Technology - Materials</b>	<b>Energy</b>
Chemistry + Mathematics Materials Technology Structure and Solid Modelling Materials Failure Analysis Control Process Design Petroleum Product Engineering Transport Process Modelling Health and Safety Management	Chemistry + Mathematics Thermodynamics Sustainable Energy Health and Safety Management Control Reaction Engineering Transport Process Modelling Upstream Production Operation Refinery Operation
<b>Water (Pollution, Treatment, Freshwater)</b>	<b>Food and Pharmaceutical</b>
Chemistry + Mathematics Transport Process Modelling Fluid Mechanics Engineering Thermodynamics Health and Safety Management Separation Process Engineering Desalination Technology Cell and Microbiology for Engineers Reaction Engineering Control Process Design	Chemistry + Mathematics Transport Process Modelling Separation Process Engineering Food and Pharmaceutical Engineering Control Process Design Reaction Engineering Engineering Thermodynamics Fluid Mechanics Health and Safety Management Cell and Microbiology for Engineers

Introducing the scope of Energy and Water minimisation and carbon capture are often the top level objective in each of the experiments.

Note, most (except distillation and absorption) of these equipment are table top small scale equipment (Figure 1) suitable for university teaching ([www.armfield.co.uk](http://www.armfield.co.uk)). However, these equipment do not necessarily provide the scope for energy, water and pollution minimisation. Therefore a technical audit of the lab was carried out with the funding from the National HE STEM Programme to assess the energy and water usages and sound pollution level so that further actions can be taken to minimise energy and water consumptions and sound pollution wherever possible. The ultimate goal is to make the

**Table 3. Weekly Water and Energy Usage in the Lab.**

Equipment	Water Usage, L	Energy Usage, kWh	Sound Pollution dB
Corrosion Kit	3.6	99.36	Negligible
Absorption (CO <sub>2</sub> Capture)	900	0.86 (Water Pump) 1.73 (Air Pump)	74 (Air Pump)
Distillation	750.0	7.36	Negligible
Cooling Tower	3.0	2.56	Negligible
Batch Reactor	5.0	0.69	Negligible
CSTR	5.0	0.69	Negligible
Tubular Reactor	7.5	0.69	Negligible
Shell & Tube Heat Exchanger	225.0	0.20	Negligible
Plate Heat Exchanger	225.0	0.20	Negligible
Process Control	150.0	3.0	Negligible
Fluidised Bed	10.0	0.65	Negligible
Sedimentation Tank	240.0	0.67	Negligible
Aeration Unit	20.0	0.02	Negligible
Desalination (Reverse Osmosis)	2400.0	9.3	75 (low flow) 85 (high flow)
Water Distiller	4.0	4.64	Negligible
<b>Total Per Session ~</b>	<b>4900</b>	<b>135</b>	
<b>Total for 2 sessions</b>	<b>9800</b>	<b>270</b>	

**Figure 1. Chemical Engineering Unit Operation Lab at Bradford.**

laboratory green and to impart this knowledge to our students working in the laboratory. Table 3 shows the weekly energy and water usage together with sound pollution level for each of the equipment.

### 3.1. Observations

#### a) Corrosion Kit

High power consumption of about 100 kWh is noted. We suggest using small air pump (run intermittently).

#### b) Gas Absorption Unit

- Currently for each experiment about 900 L of water is used. We suggest a bigger storage tank to reuse the water. An inverter drive could also be used to control the water flow rate. This would reduce the power consumption.
- Air pump noise is about 74 dB. We suggest the use of an inverter drive to control air flow which would reduce noise and power consumption

- c) Distillation Column  
Currently for each experiment about 750 L of water is used. We suggest using a re-circulating chiller unit to conserve water
- d) Heat Exchanger  
Currently for each experiment about 450 L of water is used which is currently wasted. There is an opportunity for water saving by using a small storage tank and natural cooling in between experimental sessions.
- e) Process Control Unit  
Currently for each experiment about 150 L of water is used. There is an opportunity for water saving by using a small storage tank.
- f) Sedimentation Tank  
Currently for each experiment about 240 L of water is used. There is an opportunity for water saving by using a large storage tank.
- g) Reverse Osmosis
  - (i) Currently for each experiment about 2400 L of water is used. There is an opportunity for huge water saving by recirculation and by installing a chiller unit. Concentrated brine is currently disposed of after each experiment session. Instead of wasting this huge amount of water, make up water can be added just to match the salinity of feed water before each run.
  - (ii) Water pump noise is about 85 dB. We suggest the use of acoustic sound proofing for the unit.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Carrying out this initial study, in a relatively small laboratory, has shown just how much water and power is consumed on a weekly basis and it has also given us an indication as to where significant savings can be made. Often, the focus is on delivering the curriculum and so these types of laboratories are operated without thinking about or looking at the consumption of the utilities. All Chemical Engineering laboratories throughout the UK universities and globally should look at their water and power usage in order to make them more sustainable and hence greener. The degree of sound pollution should also be addressed because often pumps, motors, compressors etc. are found running simultaneously in teaching laboratories, creating a substantial amount of noise.

This project has opened up our eyes and shown that even in a relatively small University laboratory environment, savings in water and power usage can be massive. Since carrying out this project we have been sharing our findings with our students and focussing their minds in the area of energy, water and pollution minimisation. This type of review offers valuable understanding into how undergraduate students identify and process significant issues such as green principles and the adoption of more sustainable practices within the context of chemical engineering.

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