

UWE ESD VIGNETTE

Published in:

Stirling, S., Maxey . L, Luna, Heather (Eds.), 2013. *The Sustainable University - Process and Prospects*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp252-253.

As a case study in Chapter 12 - Whole institutional change towards sustainable universities

Full reference:

Grant, M., 2013. *Strategic approaches to ESD and sustainability at the University of the West of England*. In Stirling, S., Maxey . L, Luna, Heather (Eds.). *The Sustainable University - Process and Prospects*. Abingdon:Routledge, pp252-253

Strategic approaches to ESD and sustainability at the University of the West of England

The University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE) is a large modern university, located in Bristol, one of Europe's greenest cities. It has approximately 30,000 students and 3,500 staff providing a range of UG, PG and CPD courses plus extensive research and knowledge exchange activity across four campuses. In 2007, a 'cross-university sustainability board was constituted, chaired by a pro-vice chancellor, reporting to the Academic Board and Board of Governors. Acknowledging unnecessary environmental impacts from the organisation's operation, the board was charged with developing a five-year sustainability strategy and action plan. Crucially the board recognised that the university's major impact on sustainable development would be in educating its students, whatever their discipline and so education for sustainable development (ESD), would be at the core of the UWE approach.

The ambition for the initiative was given voice and commitment through a five year plan, the 'Sustainability Strategy 2008/2012'. This articulated the vision that 'by 2012 UWE will be recognised by its students, staff and wider stakeholders as one of the leading universities in the UK for its sustainability performance'. A deliberately inspiring statement, which helped to galvanise the sustainability board and led to success and recognition in several key areas. This strategic goal was underpinned by objectives and performance targets in leadership and management and in nine thematic areas. Regular meetings of the board, with reports against targets, kept up momentum; all the original targets were comprehensively revised in 2011.

In parallel to this high level activity, two internal stakeholder networks were established to extend commitment and activity across the institution. On the operational side, sustainability leads were identified in each faculty and service to marshal action through convening regular representative sustainability groups. On the ESD side, a baseline study of sustainability

content in all modules was undertaken to identify the extent, quality and nature of provision. The study also involved in depth interviews with academics across the whole university. This report, with its 10 recommendations, initiated an ongoing university wide ESD programme. This has seen the establishment, and embedding within the formal reporting structure, of an internal knowledge exchange group for ESD. It has also led to: an annual sustainability conference for all staff linking ESD and operational sustainability; an ESD employability report; production of sustainability content for university wide programmes; an induction for ESD for all new academic staff; incorporation of sustainable development into the new lecturer programme, and the development of a unique cross-faculty Masters programme 'Sustainable Development in Practice'.

Recognition has been patchy, but not without considerable high points, such as being consistently rated as Good Honours in the People and Planet Green League; shortlisting by the *Times Higher Education* for Outstanding Contribution to Sustainable Development; gaining a Carbon Trust Standard mark of excellence; and winning the Green Gown award in 2010 for 'Continuous Improvement – Institutional Change'. On the other hand, there is work to be done in extending good practice, joining-up better across the institution and more fully involving students in the initiative. For example a recent survey of all heads of department shed some light on weaknesses in monitoring and information flow of ESD activity across the organisation.

Coming to the end of the first five year sustainability strategy is allowing UWE to take stock. There is strong commitment in the Vice Chancellor's Executive and Board of Governors and UWE will re-challenge itself with a new five year strategy. In reflecting on its achievements and remaining challenges the University will need to determine how it wishes to further embed sustainable development into its entire strategic and operational decision making. The university has made great strides in developing its whole institutional approach but recognises that there is still much to be done strategically, operationally and in winning hearts and minds for the whole institutional change offer of the university.

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22 April 12