

## Canterbury Christ Church University

### Learning and Skills

#### The *Futures Initiative*

#### About the project

##### Summary

The *Futures Initiative* seeks to enhance academic staff knowledge and skills and experience in sustainability education to build capacity for leadership in curriculum change. Underpinned by clearly articulated principles and understandings, the *Futures Initiative* has developed an exploratory approach to staff development; making ethical connections to oneself, to others and the environment stand at its heart. The Initiative has funded 65 separate projects and engaged hundreds of staff, students and volunteers over the past four years. There is now increasing evidence that it is having an impact across the institution and that it is starting to develop the necessary mass to support long-term, deep rooted change.

##### Project partners

Individual projects have involved local and global community groups and universities in the UK and overseas. These include:

Canterbury Cathedral and Archives, Commonwork, EarthCraftuk, Kent Wildlife Trust, Madurai YMCA (South India), Maidstone Museum, Turner Contemporary Gallery (Margate), The Teach for Malaysia programme, World Education Development Group (East Kent)

#### The results

##### The problem

Developing sustainability awareness is a long term process which involves engaging with a highly complex and contested agenda. It challenges our values and principles at a fundamental level. Misinformation, hidden barriers and ideological objections compound the problem. Deep rooted change requires conviction rather than compliance and this takes time to develop.

##### The approach

The *Futures Initiative* has evolved over more than a decade and has its roots in earlier action groups and collaboration between committed members of staff. The principles and understandings which underpin the Initiative emerged from these groups and were consolidated in the discussions surrounding the Green Academy in 2011. These include:



##### Profile

- HEI
- 1,426 staff
- 18,000 full and part time students
- Cathedral city location

# Finalist's case study

Staff development	A focus on long-term capacity building in all curriculum areas
Voluntary change	A commitment to organic, evolutionary and voluntary change
Inclusion	An inclusive approach which involves both students and staff as partners
Community	A pro-active approach to working with community groups both locally and globally
Shallow hierarchies	An organizational structure which seeks to minimize power structures
Active learning	A bias towards interactive, holistic and creative approaches to learning
Emotional literacy	A recognition that learning involves emotional and spiritual dimensions
Risk taking	A culture that supports experiment and risk taking
Optimism	A hopeful and positive mindset
Rigour	A critical and open approach to sustainability and environmental issues

## Our goals

Our goal is to develop a University environment in which people can explore sustainable living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In line with the sector guidance from the QAA we recognize four inter-related components to sustainability: (1) global citizenship, (2) environmental stewardship, (3) social justice, ethics and well-being and (4) futures thinking. We aspire that these should be integrated across all operational areas, curriculum and research, and that they should be embedded in the culture, practices and physical environment of the University. We believe this process is essential to the health of the University, its community and to wider society.

## Obstacles and solutions

Obstacle	Solution
Lack of knowledge amongst staff and students	<p>Presentations at staff training sessions</p> <p>Creating a customised website for staff and students on sustainability and environmental awareness</p> <p>Web-based materials for new staff as part of induction process</p>
Resistance from staff who do not see how sustainability relates to their particular discipline area	Example of successful <i>Futures Initiative</i> projects conducted by colleagues in their School or Faculty
Limitations to time and money available to promote sustainability agenda	Developing links and connections with 'allies' in all areas of the University

## Performance and results

The *Futures Initiative* has now supported 65 projects in all Faculties of the University over the past four years engaging approximately 10% (140 members) of academic staff. Colleagues have also been supported to develop their thinking and ideas through reading groups, staff development events and special residential sessions. New modules focusing on sustainability and environmental issues have been developed, validated and implemented in areas as disparate as Business Studies, Childhood Studies, Criminal Justice and Computing. The work of the *Futures Initiative* has also led to academic research which has been disseminated at conferences and through papers both nationally and internationally.

## The future

### Lessons learned

- 1 Sustainability thinking and environmental concern are based on values and cannot be imposed.
- 2 Building the capacity and capability of academic staff is a long term process which is essential to meaningful institutional change.
- 3 Integrating sustainability thinking in existing university structures is both complex and challenging process which requires as many 'allies' as possible.

## Sharing your project

Over the last year alone the work of the *Futures Initiative* has been featured at:

- World Symposium on Sustainable Development at Universities: Manchester Metropolitan University in September 2014
- Copernicus Alliance Conference: Charles University, Prague in October 2014
- Education for Sustainability in Higher Education conference: Plymouth University in January 2015
- Global Sustainability Institute Seminar Series, Anglia Ruskin University in March 2015
- TEESNet annual conference: Building Capacities for Educators for a Just and Sustainable World: Liverpool Hope University in July 2015

A critical evaluation and summary of the project is due to be published shortly in an edited book on sustainability education. The details are as follows:

Scoffham, S. (2016 forthcoming) 'Grass Roots and Green Shoots: Building ESD Capacity at a UK University' in Davim, P. and Leal Filho, W. (Eds) *Challenges in Higher Education for Sustainability*, New York: Springer

## What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

Becoming a Green Gown Award finalist has

- (a) helped to further raise and consolidate the status and role of sustainability in academic life within the University
- (b) validated the work we are doing on the *Futures Initiative* and its innovative role in the HE sector
- (c) celebrated the activities of all those colleagues who have been involved in *Futures Initiative* projects, especially the staff team that leads and implements it.

## Further information

(Include contacts details, social media links, website address)

The *Futures Initiative* core team can be contacted at: [sustainability@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@canterbury.ac.uk)

Canterbury Christ Church University webpages: <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/sustainability/sustainability.aspx>

Exploring Sustainability website: <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/exploring-sustainability/>

Link to the *Futures Initiative* Third Annual Report:

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/sustainability/docs/FI%20Report%20version%205%20Nov%202014.pdf>

Link to general publicity flyer about the *Futures Initiative*:

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/sustainability/docs/futures-initiative-in-a-nutshell.pdf>

Link to leaflet about *Futures Initiative* Principles and Approaches:

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/sustainability/docs/fi-principles-and-approaches.pdf>

Link to Guidance about the *Futures Initiative* for bidders;

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/sustainability/docs/guidance-notes-on-bidding-for-fi-funding.pdf>

NB: The *Futures Initiative* bid application form is downloadable as a Word document from this webpage:

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/sustainability/projects.aspx> It will soon also be available as an online form.