



Green Gown
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Canterbury Christ Church University

Learning & Skills

The *Futures Initiative*:

Building capacity for long term curriculum change

About the project

Summary

Our mission is to enhance academic staff, knowledge, skills and experience in sustainability education to breed leadership in curriculum change! After 5 years and 90 projects, involving hundreds of staff, students and volunteers, the tide is beginning to turn!

The *Futures Initiative (FI)* is underpinned by a conviction that critical and creative engagement with sustainability is an essential component of a balanced university education, and that a forward-looking curriculum will be imbued with a spirit of optimism and pragmatism.

FI has had a significant influence on institutional strategy, such that sustainability education is now embedded at the highest level and institutional responses are now being driven throughout the business infrastructure.

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, Earthcraft UK, 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



Canterbury
Christ Church
University

Profile

- Higher Education
- 18,000 full and part time students
- 1,430 staff
- Cathedral City Location



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Initiative emerged from these groups and were consolidated in the discussions surrounding the Green Academy in 2011. These include:

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| 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 twenty first 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 | Presentations at staff training sessions Customised website for staff and students on sustainability and environmental awareness Web-based materials for new staff as part of induction process |
| 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 |



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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 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 continued to be disseminated:

Achieving curriculum change for ESD in cash-strapped times, Workshop given at the EAUC annual conference, Bristol, May 2016

From Strategic intent to business integration, Presentation given at the EAUC Cambridge Leadership Lab. July 2016

Scoffham. S. (2016) '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 the colleagues who have been involved in the *Futures Initiative* projects, especially the staff team that leads and implements it.

Further information

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