



Green Gown
Awards 2016



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Finalist's case study

University of Abertay

Best Newcomer

Innovating Locally, Transforming Globally: Curriculum Development and Education for Sustainability at Abertay University

About the project

Summary

With our new Strategic Plan, Abertay aims to revolutionize the way in which it approaches University education by embracing a whole institutional approach to ESD. It is a radical change in our teaching practices which is articulated in our new Teaching and Learning Enhancement Strategy. This states that: 'The university's vision is to create a distinctive Abertay student learning experience that has the potential to transform its students' lives and is recognized globally', while in doing so, Abertay is 'committed to making sustainability integral to the delivery of teaching', through actively engaging in 'promoting a clear understanding of and commitment to sustainable development so that people can contribute to the overall goal through their individual decisions'.

Project partners

The entire University has been co-opted into the Project. Being an important part of the University's Strategic Plan 2015-2020, staff and students, as well as the wider Abertay Community are expected to embody the changes embed in the Plan in their work here at the University.

The results

The problem

Teaching and learning in higher education is going through a period of significant transformation driven by changes to university funding, increased student diversity, increased demands from learners and policymakers for flexible learner journeys and increased choice, significant advances in technology and the rise in social media. At the same time, societies the world over are faced with eminence and complex problems, where knowledge and skills need reassessed, if we are to properly tackle them. Education is in many respects at the forefront of this endeavor. While the changes we are enacting at Abertay are responding to these changes.

The approach

In developing a transformational experience for our students Abertay are aiming to achieve three interrelated objectives: 1) reforming our curriculum; 2) incentivising student performance; and, 3) rising the status of teaching.



ABERTAY

Profile

- Abertay was formally recognized as a University in 1994
- With a city Centre campus, we have 3384 students (includes full and part time students) and 528 staff.



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Our goals

Our goals are threefold; 1) To create A distinctive, transformational Abertay student experience; 2) To Create Excellent Abertay Graduates; and, 3) to ensure our teaching staff will feel empowered, valued and confident professionals who employ a range of innovative, efficient and effective learning, teaching and assessment methods all of whom, from 2017.

Obstacles and solutions

Staff Buy-in	Raising Environmental Awareness, and the principles and characteristics of ESD, through workshops, seminars and facilitating an active research agenda oriented around Sustainable Development and comparable issues.
Student Buy-n	Continuingly rehearsing the advantages and benefits of ESD (environmental consciousness) with students through both the formal and informal curriculum. Where possible, involving student in the 'co-production' of the new curriculum, and ensuring student representatives are properly involved in University Committees.
Wider Community (Stakeholder) Buy-in	Through experiential teaching techniques, we are bringing the wider Abertay community into the classroom to talk too our students and conversely we are taking our students out into the wider community to have a hands on experience in working with communities. In this regards, we are hoping for community buy-in.

Performance and Results

The results of our endeavors in radically changing our teaching practices are measured here as regards our results in national league tables and in various accolades – our shortlisting for a Green Gowns, Best Newcomer Award, being one of these.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has confirmed the quality of the student experience and the academic standard of awards at Abertay University judging that it has 'effective' arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience. The University has been ranked as the top modern university in Scotland by The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2017. Rising twelve places from last year, and has shown one of the highest rises in the league table, moving from 97 to 85. Abertay is now the highest ranking university among all seven Scottish institutions known as modern universities. These results see Abertay continuing a trend of improving its positioning in all three league tables this year, ranking 11 out of the 14 Scottish institutions measured in the Guardian University Guide 2017 and 11th in Scotland in the Complete University Guide, as well as increased overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2016.

Additionally, Abertay has been shortlisted for the "University of the Year" Award in the Times Higher Education (THE) Awards 2016. Abertay is one of just six universities across the UK – and the only one in Scotland – to receive the nomination. University of the Year is awarded to "an institution that demonstrated exceptional performance during the 2014-15 academic year". The judges look for evidence of "bold, imaginative and



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innovative initiatives that have advanced the institution's reputation". Our shortlisting here talks to the radical changes in our TLE strategy as identified above.

The Future

Lessons learned

Change management is an important consideration within the context of academia, especially as regards pedagogical concerns, and while we have tried hard at Abertay to engage both staff and students in change as reflected above, there are pockets of both staff and students who feel ESD (as associated with the deployment of our Abertay Attributes) is an imposition. We continue to work through this issue in creating further opportunity of discussion around TLE changes.

Sharing your project

In sharing our project, we have, in the main, used traditional academic points of dissemination. These have included presentations at EAUC (Scotland), Learning for Sustainability Scotland, HEA and Guild HE events. Staff at the University have also written or contributed towards published material. Additionally, the changes highlighted above and their relevance as regards HEA, has been the focus of a inter-institutional discernment, funded through competitive internal grants under the auspices of the Universities Teaching and Learning Enhancement Office.

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

Our Shortlisting for an Award, under the 'Best Newcomer' category has allowed us to further discern and nexus between ESD and our Teaching and learning Enhancement Plans. In doing so we have been able to further locate our discussion on 'Abertay attributes' within the context of Geddes' work.

Further information

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