



Green Gown  
Awards 2016



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# Finalist's case study

## Prifysgol Bangor University Leadership

Dr Einir Young  
Director of Sustainability



PRIFYSGOL  
BANGOR  
UNIVERSITY

### Profile

- Higher Education
- 11,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 2000 staff
- Rural

### The candidate's approach

#### Summary

"You can do anything if you set your mind to it – and don't let anybody persuade you otherwise"; that was my mother's mantra as I was growing up. 'Can't' was not an option – if one door shuts in your face, think around it, find another door. I can honestly say that my mother was right. 'Sustainability' is easy to misunderstand. Too many people can't see beyond 'low energy light bulbs' 'recycling', or just roll their eyes and think 'how boring'. But when people 'get' that it's about us as individuals and communities, about the economy, society, our culture and environment and about our collective future as global citizens suddenly, the light comes on. People enjoy participating in things that matter and what could possibly matter more than the well-being of current and future generations? At Bangor University we have the privilege of working with the emerging citizens of the future who have the capacity to come up with solutions to problems that haven't yet occurred. Our resource base is rich indeed. It's not always easy to find the right words to convey the message but if one message falls on deaf ears then we have to find another way to get the message across. There is never a dull moment, albeit there being plenty of opposition and challenges along the way – there are some people who just don't like change. But I've been lucky. Over the last ten years I have found people at all levels and walks of life in Bangor University who have grasped the vision and believed that we can do things differently by working together. I have a small team of inspirational people who are enthusiastic about learning by doing with others like-minded people.

I started my career at the University as a lab technician, a very long time ago, and never imagined that it would be the first step towards my dream job. I have been Director of Sustainability for the past 12 months, the last year being one of the most rewarding yet. I hope that this is only the beginning for the University, our team and myself on our journey towards Sustainability. As we say in Wales these days #TogetherStronger.

#### Project partners

Staff, students, Senior Management, Undeb Bangor (Students' Union), the Wales Centre for Behaviour Change, ERDF funded projects (e.g. SEACAMS, KESS), Makerere University (Uganda), Hub Affrica Cymru, Good Practice Exchange at the Wales Audit Office, the Higher Education Wales Future Generations Group.

### The results

#### The problem

Over the last ten years Bangor University had been making substantial progress in terms of environmental management and sustainability. This was as a result of a 'bottom-up' approach that supported enthusiastic people like myself to drive sustainable development principles and actions through the institution. We were increasingly successful. The University has attained Green Dragon Level 5 since 2009, and ISO14001 since



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2014. We were 'Best in Wales' in the People and Planet Green League for two consecutive years and are in the top 5% of internationally recognised 'green' Universities. We realised that sustainability was beginning to gain traction across the curriculum and student experience; it was therefore time to formalise this growing commitment.

## The approach

Sustainability became a golden thread and a strategic driver in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and the team I led (a business facing department working with SMEs 'making business sense of sustainability') was recognised as 'the' group that already provided *de facto* leadership across the University, but that this needed to be formally recognised. I was appointed Director of Sustainability and report directly to the Deputy Vice-chancellor with a remit to 'bring sustainability to life' across the campus. Recently, although the University does not have a duty under the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFGA) we have decided that this is the framework by which we will contextualise sustainability – adopting the five ways of working to achieve the seven well-being goals.

The approach I am adopting is one of 'strategic shaping' rather than one of imposing a top-down action plan created in a small room by a handful of people. This enables us to mobilise as many participants as possible (students and staff) to help make positive changes to the way we do things to the advantage of the University. This is not an approach that claims instant wins or provides conclusive transformational headlines in the short term. It is more a 'slow tourism' or 'slow city' approach to institutional change. I'll use the curriculum as an example. Following consultation, we have recognised at the outset that the process of transforming the curriculum will take seven years to complete! During the academic year 2016-17 two tasks are planned i) Course revalidation documentation will be updated to reflect the new requirement and ensure passage through the relevant committees ii) I will be working with up to three new programmes to co-create ways of incorporating subject specific WFGA related learning outcomes and identifying the best ways of demonstrating that those outcomes are achieved within the curriculum. We will document the process and answer the questions arising to help others as they revise their programmes for revalidation. The revalidation cycle will be completed by 2023. Quick-wins have been identified to ensure that students are given formal access to WFG in the curriculum as it stands. I am working with the Employability Manager and Directors of Teaching & Learning to incorporate Sustainability and the Well-being of Future Generations in a 'real-world' context to the existing timetable.

## Our goals

The WFGA and the way we are seeking to make use of it in the University, provides a framework for all strategic decision making. This will require us, over time, to overhaul all our core processes including budgeting and financial management.

We are working towards Integrated Reporting <IR> which provides a framework for reporting that promotes:

- integrated thinking to understand how an organisation's short, medium and long term future relies upon a range of interdependent resources;
- the concept of total value – tangible and intangible;
- an understanding of the negative as well as the positive impacts of the organisation; and
- a clear articulation of strategy which sets out how the organisation intends to enhance its positive impact and ameliorate or eradicate the negative impacts.



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## Obstacles and solutions

Getting noticed	Senior management want solutions not problems – find a way to give them what they want. If you are senior management, look out for the enthusiasts and support them.
A 'why should we bother?' attitude?	It's essential that any sustainability/well-being of future generations' related activity is a help not a hindrance. Taking people with us is the key to success. As the African proverb says <i>'If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together'</i>
It is not a competition – one size does not fit all.	Looking to others and comparing with 'best in class' is motivational but can also be soul destroying. The playing field is not level and you can only do what you can do to the best of <u>your</u> institution's ability at your own speed focusing on equity rather than simply on equality
Perceived lack of time/resources	Be creative, do things differently, be honest.
Two steps forward one step back	Nobody said that life is fair or easy and it can be an uphill struggle. Just don't give up. Find a group of like-minded people and support each other.

## Performance and results

I have been Director of Sustainability for just over a year but involved with Sustainability at Bangor for more than a decade. The first nine years were critical to the success of the last year – I would say it's been rather like mushroom farming. The mycelium grows invisibly under the surface and when the conditions are right mushrooms appear...everywhere! Throughout Bangor University 'hubs' of activity associated with sustainability and the well-being of future generations are appearing spontaneously, and capturing this through integrated reporting over the coming years is going to be very rewarding. We maintained our ISO14001 accreditation, we achieved Green Dragon Level 5 (2016) – the first in Wales to do so to the new, more rigorous standard, we're in the top 5% of the world's 'greenest' Universities and we've been shortlisted for 2 CIWM Awards, 4 Green Gown Awards and 1 Cynnal Cymru Award. Amazing team work and commitment all round.

## The future

### Lessons learned

1. Top level commitment is essential for harnessing grass roots passion and grass root involvement is critical to realise top level ambitions.
2. Freedom to follow your passion is essential but needs to be combined with some structure to capture impact, especially in an age of austerity where every penny counts.
3. Becoming 'The Sustainable University' is not about following a blueprint (which doesn't really exist) but taking action that 'fits' your circumstances. It is a long term commitment rooted in institutional values not a short term fix.
4. Awards are rewarding as they provide recognition internally and externally for all the hard work carried out, but it's important that we don't rest on our laurels.



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## Sharing your project

We are becoming known as an institution that is serious about Sustainability and the Well-being of Future Generations and for having a realistic rather than an idealistic approach. My emphasis is on working with and alongside people to be the best they can be in their own circumstances with the resources at their disposal. I want to move away from the notion that sustainability is something that is 'done to' or 'done for' people. This approach is attracting international attention and we are always ready to share our experiences and to learn with and from others.

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

*"Bangor University aims to be the Sustainable University. Einir's emphasis on benefit-led realism over idealism enables us to take a lead in Wales, bringing sustainability and the well-being of future generations into all aspects of what we do. Being a Green Gown Award finalist is a recognition of progress on that journey."* -

Professor John Hughes, Vice-chancellor, Bangor University

## Further information

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