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University of Edinburgh Learning and Skills

Our Changing World - Addressing Global Challenges Through Academic Research

About the project

Summary

"Our Changing World" is the University of Edinburgh's annual high-profile public lecture series which addresses global challenges facing society and the role of science and academia in meeting them. Students and the wider public hear from a variety of leading academics from the University, with students engaging with key challenges and critical thinking through researching the topics in greater detail through the "Our Changing World" undergraduate course.

Project partners

The Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability, the Global Academies and the School of Biomedical Sciences are the key partners in the delivery of the public lecture series and the undergraduate course.

The results

Our approach

"Our Changing World" is an annual, very high-profile series of public lectures addressing global challenges facing society, and the role of University research and scholarship in meeting them. Inaugurated in September 2010, lectures have been given by eminent staff and external speakers on topics ranging from population, environment and resources, climate change, climate justice and human rights, and challenges in global health and medicine.

The lectures have been attended by over 15,000 members of the public, staff, students and alumni from the University and other HEIs in the region, and teachers and pupils from local schools. The lectures are made available free on youtube and iTunesU, and have featured on the iTunesU "Noteworthy" page, with over 600,000 downloads worldwide as well as ~64,000 views on youtube.

First-year undergraduate students from all disciplines, are encouraged to enroll on the "our Changing World" course: they attend the lectures along with the public, and participate in related teaching activities including facilitated group discussions, produce research reports and posters on selected topics, and undertake a group project. Students thus engage first-hand with key global issues and challenges, and develop their researching and critical thinking skills, in the very first semester at University.



OUR
CHANGING
WORLD

Profile

- Higher Education
- 35,000 + students (includes full and part time students)
- 13,000+ staff
- Several campus sites in and around Edinburgh.



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Our goals

The purpose of the lecture series is multi-dimensional as it supports a range of University objectives. These include: Promoting community relations by engaging with the wider public, Supporting the student experience through the undergraduate courses, providing a platform for public engagement to showcase the best research at the University, Opportunity for staff, students, alumni and the general public to gain an awareness of the academic research taking place at the University. These objectives continue to be met by the series. Since 2010 the public lecture series has successfully engaged audiences and promoted world leading research at the University. This success has been based on a number of factors.

Obstacles and solutions

Develop a whole institutional approach	Invite academics from a range of academic schools and promote as a public engagement opportunity.
Utilise resources from the public talks	The undergraduate Our Changing World course and other courses have used the videos of the talks as resource for their discussions.
Attract a diverse audience	Extensive engagement and promotional methods.

Performance and results

Inclusive: Our Changing World has established itself as an inclusive university wide event that engages with students and staff from all disciplines, and also the public and local community, including school groups. The lectures are free to attend.

Following: Popular following with both students and the public. A typical lecture attracts approximately 200 – 300 attendees. The lectures have been attended by over 15,000 members of the public, staff, students and alumni from the University and other HEIs in the region, and teachers and pupils from local schools.

Resources: The value and impact of the Our Changing World series goes beyond the auditorium; each lecture is filmed and catalogued online, and a podcast is produced which is available to download for free from iTunes. These resources are regularly used in teaching within the University, and attract a considerable amount of attention online, with videos receiving thousands of views on YouTube. The lectures have featured on the iTunesU "Noteworthy" page, with over 600,000 downloads worldwide as well as ~64,000 views on YouTube.

The "Our Changing World" undergraduate course directly benefits students by encouraging them to critically think about global challenges early on in their university academic career. In group discussions following the public lectures they discuss these topics in depth and are encouraged to think about how these topics relate to each other and identify solutions to these issues – joined up systems thinking is very much encouraged. Students enrolled on the course are increasing year on year with close to 100 this past academic year.

Feedback from students includes:

- "Interdisciplinary nature of the course helped to form well-informed views on the subject"
- "Being introduced to a range of contemporary global concepts which I wouldn't have ordinarily been exposed to on my degree programme"
- "The focus group discussions generated a great amount of debate – students from different programmes bringing different views to the discussion"
- "The level of interaction with students from different programmes was excellent".



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The future

Lessons learned

1. Impact of having inclusive event series: The lectures are free to attend and open to all. As a result, each event attracts such a wider range of people from both within the University and the general public. Our Changing World helps the University of Edinburgh build connections with our local community, and bring staff, students and members of the public together.
2. Wider impact of resources: The videos and podcasts produced help us reach those who cannot attend the event in person. They have also been of great value to learning and teaching, as the recordings are used in tutorials/lectures around the University. They have also led to other exciting opportunities, such a Summer School programme.
3. Benefits of collaboration: The 'Our Changing World' course is open to students from all disciplines. As a result, each student brings a different perspective to tutorial discussions. The critical and research skills gained, have an impact on other courses and therefore benefit the wider 'student experience' at the University, and the quality of learning and teaching.

Sharing your project

Increasingly the University is sharing the content and learnings from the Our Changing World public lecture series to a wide audience through optimising new communication channels. All the talks are recorded and extensively viewed on YouTube and iTunes. This coming year short videos with keynote speakers will be shared in advance of the talks to attract a wider audience by providing an insight into the upcoming talk. The talks are also used by the Our Changing World undergraduate course, with students discussing the topics in workshops as part of their course. Increasingly, academic courses across a range of academic schools are using the videos of the talks as content for their lectures and tutorials.

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

"The University of Edinburgh is committed to being a leading socially responsible and sustainable university. For us, a key way to achieve this is through collaboration, engaging with the wider public, and providing students an opportunity to learn about the global challenges we face. The Green Gown Awards is tremendously important to us as it celebrates the commitment and enthusiasm that we share within the University. We're delighted be shortlisted!"

Dave Gorman
Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability

Further information

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