

Finalist's case study

Aston University Courses and Learning The Aston MSc Social Responsibility and Sustainability – developing responsible leaders of tomorrow



Profile:

- HE
- Aston Business School
- 4985 students
- 230 staff
- Urban

Section 1 About the project

Summary

The MSc Social Responsibility & Sustainability - developing responsible leaders of tomorrow. Taught in a business context, the MSc combines real world knowledge with an interdisciplinary and reflective approach and provides learning beyond the classroom. The course is delivered full time on campus and part time on line. It impacts on different sectors, local, national and international communities and learning from the project is shared with others within and beyond Aston.

Project partners

The course draws on the expertise of academic colleagues in a range of disciplines within and beyond the business school

Section 2 The results

The problem

The idea for the MSc Social Responsibility & Sustainability came out of the Curriculum Review Process that aimed to establish the extent to which ethics, social responsibility and sustainability were included in the curriculum and to make recommendations for the future integration of these issues in the curriculum. The review identified the opportunity to develop a specialised MSc in Social Responsibility and Sustainability within the portfolio of Masters programmes offered at Aston Business School.

The approach

An initial competitor analysis to identify similar programmes offered elsewhere was conducted as part of the Business School Curriculum Report. Further market research aimed at (inter alia) informing programme title, outcomes and content was then conducted with MSc students/Final year UG students, organisations with a track record in CSR/Sustainability and those with employees potentially interested in a part-time qualification. There appeared to be two distinct opportunities for the programme; Full time for home and overseas students because of a growing awareness and interest in qualifications in these areas. Part time/Distance Learning aimed at an increasing number of people in organisations that have CSR/Sustainability in their responsibilities or have specific roles.

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Our goals

The MSc Social Responsibility & Sustainability aims to provide both academic and practical perspectives relating to this area and is aimed at those interested in working in roles related to CSR and Sustainability in commercial business, the public sector, social enterprises or the not for profit and charitable sectors. It also provides the opportunity to study a specialist MSc for those currently working in this area as well as those who aspire to do so.

Obstacles and solutions

Interdisciplinary approach	Working with colleagues with shared interests can overcome 'silo' mentality
Institutional processes	Need to work with management and admin systems to enable 'non standard' courses to develop
Raising awareness	Marketing approaches may differ for courses of this nature compared to traditional business programmes.

Performance and results

The MSc cohorts comprise of students from across the globe but also from different backgrounds in terms of work experience. The first intake of 12 full time students in 2011, were a fantastic group of individuals - all passionate about social responsibility and/or sustainability, determined to change the world! Graduates from the programme are now working in key roles in social responsibility and sustainability in a range of roles, industries and campaigns across the globe. The course has continued to grow and is now offered in full time/part time and distance learning modes. The PT distance learning version currently has 21 students from a range of business, government and community backgrounds. The students continue to be enthusiastic and willing to engage with events and activities related to social responsibility and sustainability beyond the formal curriculum.

Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

The success of MSc is down to the passion and commitment of all the colleagues who contribute to the programme and make it happen. The programme attracts students who want to 'make a difference' and this facilitates shared learning within and beyond the programme. Linking the part time/distance learning students with the full time students has facilitated the opportunities for shared learning.

Sharing our project

The students on the programme are great ambassadors for social responsibility and sustainability and are putting their learning into practice in a range of organisations across the globe. The modules from the MSc are available to students on other programmes in the University to enable shared learning. As a UN PRME Champion School, we have a commitment to working with Universities nationally and internationally. This has included sharing information on the MSc programme. We have visited other Universities and hosted colleagues at Aston in order to do this.

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

At Aston we have worked hard to embed sustainability and social responsibility into all aspects of university life – from the curriculum to estates management, from infrastructure to culture. Winning a Green Gown Award will highlight our commitment to local and international audiences and demonstrate our distinctiveness as an institution

- Professor Dame Julia King, Vice Chancellor, Aston University



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