



Building the best sustainability business cases - Top 10

Here are the **Top 10** things that were agreed at the workshop to be worth considering when compiling a business case for sustainability:

1. Do you need a business case at all?

Go back to basics and find out whether you need to write a business case at all. Can you demonstrate what you wish to achieve without having to write a full case? Does it need to be long? Would one hard-hitting paragraph or half a page of A4 suffice? Find out the requirements first.

We recognise that not all institutions will require in-depth cases so it's important to respond to the norm in your own institution in terms of the length/content/structure of your business cases. Is there a template you can adopt? Ask others who are known to have success with business cases to share their templates with you.

2. What are the resource implications and paybacks?

Resources

This should not only include the cost of the project/item but also the person resource required to deliver it/use it. Will your business case 'x' mean you can use less person resource and therefore create a saving? e.g. using student volunteers to undertake conservation work rather than using Horticulture staff.

Paybacks

It's not all about the money! However, if there are obvious paybacks (e.g. energy improvements in buildings) then you need to be clear on the payback for your investment (ROI – return on investment). Remember the paybacks are not necessarily just financial but could include:

- Reputation – will 'x' make the University look better?
- Rewards and recognition – will your project be a Green Gown Award winner or prove to be environmental/carbon best practice?
- Green League Table – will this help to improve your institution's position?
- KPIs – will your EMR return look better? Will you make the V-C smile with your lowered carbon emissions?
- Reduced maintenance – will less maintenance be required to maintain 'x'?

3. What are the curriculum or learning benefits?

Can your project tie into student and/or staff learning in anyway? The learning could be extra-curriculum as well as formal (e.g. supporting student experience through skills development). Are there opportunities to link in with research too?

4. Timelines

Be clear over the timings of delivery and also the time over which expected benefits will be realised.

5. Does it fit with strategic objectives or management targets

How does this business case tick your boss's boxes? Will it help to improve your Department's KPIs? Can it fit into your University's strategic priorities? Have you included it in your own environmental strategies?



We held a workshop at the 2014 EAUC Annual Conference about building the best business cases to help delegates with cases for personnel, biodiversity and energy. This list was then created during a breakout session and compiled to create a high level top 10. We hope you find this useful! [View the workshop presentation here](#)

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Insight guide



6. Staff and students want this too!

Attracting quality staff and students is important and there's plenty of evidence that staff and students would prefer to work for or study in more ethical organisations. Attracting quality researchers may also bring increased research income.

Use the [HEA/NUS student survey results](#) to demonstrate how important sustainability is to the student population as a whole. Students are an important source of revenue so attracting them and retaining them is key to your institutions success. If your business case will impact positively on the student experience then there may be hidden marketing benefits too.

7. Softer benefits

When selling a business case with soft impacts then focus on those benefits too:

- Could a more biodiverse landscape or healthy learning space reduce sick leave?
- Could a greener landscape promote greater productivity?
- Will your business case open up opportunities for collaboration, partnership working, enterprise or innovation?

8. Links to existing schemes/initiatives/future possibilities?

Will the business case support initiatives that are already in place? Can you build on existing strengths or structures (i.e. links to a successful campaign)? Do you have an active group who will support the development (e.g. working group, committee, volunteers)?

Are you factoring in the longer term benefits to the business case? For example, will a wooded area eventually be legally considered a carbon sink?

9. Choices and consequences or the 'options appraisal'

It's important to lay out the different options and the risks and opportunities presented by your proposal. Always include the 'do nothing' option as a point of reference, as well as making a recommendation of which option to choose.

10. Sell to your senior team using their language and values

Make sure you understand what motivates the person/people who will make the budgetary decisions. If you have already sold the concept to a leader before you put pen to paper you may already have the ally you need to get the business case approved and funded.

Thanks to

- Our Annual Conference workshop speakers: Dr Emma Fieldhouse, Environmental Manager, London South Bank University and Future We Want Ltd; John Hindley, Head of Environmental Strategy, Manchester Metropolitan University and Andrew McKenzie, Enterprise Sales Manager, Schneider Electric UK
- Huge thanks to Emma for compiling all the information collected into a top 10 which was a challenge!

What next? We know this is vital topic which causes a number of issues for our Members – tell us how we can help you in the future with business cases? Do you have any business cases to share that have proved to be successful and others could use?

Contact info@eauc.org.uk.

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