

University of Gloucestershire Courses

Everyone's Business: An Integrated Approach For Future-Focused Business Education

Section 1 About the project

Summary

The business world has been highly active in driving change for sustainability. Yet leading voices have noticed the huge 'disconnect' between 'real-world' changes and what is happening in business schools. This submission presents a successful attempt to embed Education for Sustainability (EfS) in the largest undergraduate course group at the University of Gloucestershire (UoG) – Business Management (BM). The initiative focuses on connecting students, through sustainability learning, to businesses that are practicing sustainability.

Project partners

The project was led by the University of Gloucestershire Business School and Sustainability Team who worked closely with local businesses in the area.

Section 2 The results

The problem

The business world has been highly active in driving change for sustainability. Yet leading voices have noticed the huge 'disconnect' between 'real-world' changes and what is happening in business schools. This submission presents a successful attempt to embed Education for Sustainability (EfS) in the largest undergraduate course group at the University of Gloucestershire (UoG) – Business Management (BM).

The approach

Key to the success of this initiative has been the teamwork that underpins this innovative project to reorient pedagogy and curriculum design. The efforts of the BM teaching team are supported by the Student Placements Team, Degree Plus employability scheme and the Sustainability Team, to bring connected thinking, planning and skills development into the curriculum development process. The initiative focuses on connecting students, through sustainability learning, to businesses that are practicing sustainability. This real experience and applied approach builds students' learning portfolios and also increases their employability chances.

Our goals



Profile

- HEI
- 9,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 100 staff
- Urban



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Our strategy of multi-level supports and inputs into the curriculum change process was designed to yield benefits at many levels and to make a difference for all those involved in the BM course suite:

For Students: the integrated approach to curriculum development across all modules and levels of BM improves employability and students' ability to tackle the 'cross-business' nature of sustainability in all professional and business settings. This is achieved by using 'real-world' case studies and assessments, work-focused learning and international exchanges. As the largest course group in the University, the impact on student learning in EfS through BM is significant. In addition, the high proportion of international students in BM means greater opportunity for dialogue on different cultural perspectives on sustainability, as well as the legacy that our graduates take into the global business arena.

For Staff: to revitalise the BM suite and help to safeguard its vitality and currency. The team's CPD has been extended, as have their opportunities to discuss shared approaches and collegial working across modules. **BM has become an example of successful curriculum change in EfS**, enabling sharing of insight with other colleagues at teaching forums and the dissemination work of the BM lead as a UoG Teaching Fellow. This is a source of pride and motivation for staff, as their work has been profiled in national projects and publications for best practice in this area. The new project funding they have been awarded will further incentivize this work and help them to share ideas and practice more widely with colleagues across the University.

For Employers: this approach has added value for employers, through the sustainability skills focus that our students provide to external organisations in placements and projects, as well as on employment as graduates. Our students come to see sustainability not just as a 'bolt-on' topic or a green agenda, but as an integral to the thinking and practice of the 21st century workplace, which has given them an edge in securing placements with major multinational firms including GE Systems, IBM, Panasonic and Intel. It has also improved their performance on placement and provided chances for businesses to partner with the University and share expertise on sustainability in different kinds of organisations. This is creating learning loops of input from businesses as guest lecturers, placement providers and mentors, to discussions with academic staff and students, resulting in increased capabilities and confidence not just for our graduates, but for all those involved in tackling sustainability issues across industry contexts.

Performance and results

Key Activities and Achievements -

- **New methods of teaching and assessment** including a Level 2 student essay competition to analyse sustainability in real business contexts and as a cross-business issue – sponsored and judged by a local business (Cheltenham Racecourse). This year also saw the launch of a new Level 3 module linked to UoG's commitment to the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI) which connects corporate responsibility with global citizenship to produce changes in business practice. The modules use active learning - critical for developing skills and capability not just knowledge in sustainability. EfS approaches to develop student learning are embedded, such as systemic thinking and critical reflection on leadership, strategy and business impacts.
- **An emphasis on work-focused learning** through new partnerships with businesses in this area so that students can carry out 'real' assignments and experience sustainability in the business world. This is supported by the University internship initiative *Degree Plus* and the Student Placement Teams who identify opportunities for real-world experiences in sustainability. The initiative and its projects have generated new partnership opportunities and curriculum input in the form of mentoring, placements and guest teaching from external organisations.

- **Geared to employability needs** through the use of research studies to guide the initiative. An initial report in 2010 provided perspective from local and regional businesses about their skills needs in sustainability when recruiting graduates. In 2011-12 a second study was carried out to understand trends in national policy and industry concerns in sustainability, as well as student needs at UoG to improve their employability through sustainability learning.
- **An increase in teaching resources** with the creation of a unique introductory guide to EfS in business subjects, linked to the national QAA curriculum benchmarks for Business and Management. The development of an online resource archive on EfS and business education provides staff with ideas for teaching activities, examples of best practice in sustainability in the business curriculum internationally and case studies to use of leading sustainability businesses.
- **Better professional support for staff** through workshops with leading EfS experts and an external seminar series on business and sustainability, as well as a new seminar series in 2011-12 on leadership and change management in sustainability. The evidence base for our curriculum change work has been strengthened by reviewing best practice globally and showcasing new research on needs, drivers and exemplars for EfS in business education.
- **Creating feedback mechanisms for ongoing course development** through workshop sessions with the teaching team that have helped to map and extend the place of EfS across all levels of the BM course suite. The focus has been to support the team in designing a systemic approach into the curriculum that will support student learning journeys in BM, so graduates have a clear view of what sustainability could mean in their future professional lives.
- **Extending and sharing innovation** through a new scheme within the University which funds small curriculum projects that connect sustainability learning with the principles of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The BM team has been awarded funds to develop its innovative external partnership work and to join a work group of funded projects that will share their ideas for sustainability education with other teaching teams and subject areas across all faculties.

Section 3 The future

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

"Being a Green Gown finalist is fantastic reward for colleagues in the Business Management Team who embraced the unfamiliar challenge of integrating sustainability into their work in order to improve their student's experience. Hopefully this will inspire colleagues from other faculties and institutions to take risks and try out new approaches for the benefit of sustainability."

Further information

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