

Finalist's case study

UWE, Bristol Leadership

Professor James Longhurst

Leading Sustainability.

UWE's Journey

Section 1 About the project

Summary

Embedding sustainability thinking and action into a large, diverse, multi-site, multi-disciplinary university requires commitment and leadership both from the top and distributed across the institution. UWE's journey to becoming a more sustainable university has progressed over a 20 year period influenced and directed by a variety of leaders amongst whom AVC Jim Longhurst has been a key figure. UWE's journey will continue for the foreseeable future. The university has made good progress in addressing its campus related sustainability impacts but the university recognises that it is in its educational role that it can equip graduates with the skills, knowledge and attributes necessary to meet the sustainable development challenges of the 21st century. UWE is committed to providing the opportunity for every student to engage in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the context of their discipline. In the most recent audit 90% of all students had been able to engage in this manner. In order to drive practice forward we have systematically embedded ESD into our Quality Management and Enhancement Framework to ensure annual reporting, curriculum development and review processes consider ESD.

Project partners

The primary partners are the 3300 staff and c27000 students of UWE. External partners include the QAA, HEA and professional bodies, discipline groups and our partners in industry, commerce and the voluntary sector. In our ESD work we have engaged with the QAA and HEA and Longhurst has undertaken sector leadership roles for both organisations.

Section 2 The results

The problem

Embedding sustainability thinking and action into a large, diverse, multi-site, multi-disciplinary university and ensuring ownership by staff and students.

The approach

Ensuring VC, Board of Governor and other senior staff support is in place.

Ensuring the high level policy and strategy is aligned with sustainability outcomes particularly in UWE's Strategy 2020 which, in turn, gives authority to the institutional Sustainability Plan.



University of the West of England

Profile

- UWE, Bristol
- 27000 students
- 3300 staff
- Multiple locations in Bristol and Gloucestershire

Category supported by

Inspiring Leadership

Leadership Foundation
for Higher Education

Building cross university support structures - the Sustainability Board, the Knowledge Exchange for Sustainability Education network, etc.
 Appointing excellent staff
 Developing the whole staff capability and capacity in sustainability and especially ESD
 Working with professional bodies and discipline groupings
 Working with the Students' Union especially elected officers and through the Green Leaders and the People and Planet Group.

Our goals

To meet the aims and ambition expressed in UWE Sustainability Plan 2013 - 2020 - see <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/aboutus/visionandmission/sustainability/governanceandstrategy/sustainabilitydocuments.aspx>
 This plan is endorsed by the VC, the Chair of the Board of Governors and the president of the Students' Union.

Obstacles and solutions

Obstacle	Solution
Awareness	Multi-faceted communications strategy that does not assume prior knowledge.
Policy and performance	Establish high level policy support, embed expectations in routine processes.
Expectation setting - how do you know you have done it?	Embrace diverse ways to demonstrate achievement of sustainability goals.
Capacity and capability constraints	Dedicated staff teams but over time distribute ownership, accountability and responsibility into all teams but ensure training opportunities are in place. An example is the inclusion of ESD within the UWE Academic Development Programme for new staff.
Engagement	Embedding into the organisational decision making processes. Demonstrate sustainability is not an add-on optional extra. Embedding reporting and accountability into the Quality Management and Enhancement Framework is an important step in this regard.
Sustainability Fatigue	Celebrate, reinforce and embrace diverse array of ways in which sustainability goals can be manifested and achieved.

Performance and results

Good progress is being made with meeting the Sustainability Plan aims. Progress with the individual themes is reported on a quarterly basis to the Sustainability Board where accountability and responsibility resides. Annual reporting to the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Board, Academic Board, Board of Governors, Academic Standards and Quality Committee and other deliberative and executive groupings ensure widespread awareness and action. Annual reports are published and widely discussed.

Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

A strategic long term approach embracing a wide range of stakeholders is much more likely to deliver desired goals.

Sharing our project

Longhurst and colleagues share our learning, approach and ideas through conference presentations, though engagement with the HEA and the QAA and with professional bodies and learned societies.

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

UWE is pleased that its approach to embedding sustainability across the organisation has been recognised as worthy of shortlisting in the 2014 Green Gown Award for Leadership. We have shared the shortlisting success widely within the university and amongst partners.

Further information

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UWE web site <http://www.uwe.ac.uk/>

Sustainability at UWE <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/aboutus/visionandmission/sustainability.aspx>

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