

How to do Transition in your University or College

A guide to making your university more sustainable environmentally, socially, and academically.

By the Transition Network team



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First published in Great Britain in 2016 by Transition Network
43 Fore Street

Totnes

Devon

TQ9 5HN

00 44 (0) 1803 865669

info@transitionnetwork.org

www.transitionnetwork.org

Created by Maria Cooper in collaboration with Michael Thomas
(Transition Network) and Rehema White. Supported by the
Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges and
Transition University of St Andrews.

Designed by Rob Hopkins and Jane Brady of www.emergencydesign.com

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transition
university of st andrews





Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I may remember. But involve me and I'll understand.

- Chinese Proverb
- Chinese Proverb

Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.

- Kofi Annan

The great aim of education is not knowledge but action.

- Herbert Spencer
- Herbert Spencer

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Why this guide for universities?

We have seen some great examples out there of universities* being at the forefront of exploring the lifestyles, relationships, education, and research that are required to live a good life in the future of this planet. These are inspiring places and we would like to share their practices with you, so you can adapt them and adopt whatever suits your university, and be part of the same journey.

This guide is a first collection of resources from Transition Universities. It consists of tips and experiences that can be helpful to keep in mind when doing something extraordinary in your university.

Take it, run with it, do amazing things.

What is Transition?

Transition is a movement that has been growing since 2005. It is about communities stepping up to address the big challenges they face by starting local. By coming together, they are able to create solutions together. They seek to nurture a caring culture, one focused on connection with self, others and nature and supporting each other, both as a group and in the wider community. They are reclaiming the economy, sparking entrepreneurship, reimagining work, reskilling themselves and weaving webs of connection and support.

We'll tell you some of their stories as we go through. It's an approach that has spread now to over 50 countries, in thousands of groups: in towns, villages, cities, universities, schools. One of the key ways it spreads is through telling inspiring stories. We really hope you feel inspired to take part, we'd be honoured if you did.

** When we say 'Universities' throughout this guide, we use the term to refer to any further or tertiary educational establishment.*



Transition University of St Andrews Edible Campus project has partnered with their local provide a space for the community to grow hot house vegetables. Photo: Transition Univ

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What is a Transition University?

Transition Universities create an environment where it is possible to explore what a fruitful relationship with our planet looks like. Imagine academic research and learning, visioning, practical implementation, and personal experience of sustainability all interacting—informing and motivating each other. Imagine a hub, a centre, where people can come and learn all these things, and then disseminate these ideas and practices out into the wider world. That is what can happen when a Transition initiative is started at a university.

This guide will attempt to answer your questions about what this means for your university in terms of:

- practical skills
- organisational structures
- working in groups
- the infrastructure we work in
- our own core values and beliefs

Since Transition within a university is one of many approaches to sustainability, it often works in conjunction with other approaches or initiatives. It can act as an overarching umbrella for different sustainability projects, or as a complementary arm of student and local resident engagement within the university's already existing sustainability plan. Most importantly, a Transition University is about the university community coming together and doing what they believe is needed without relying on top-down measures.

Introduction

There is increasing pressure on universities as higher education institutions to embrace sustainability to minimise their costs, come in line with government and UN ambitions, and future-proof their operations. On top of that, students and staff members are demonstrating high expectations on their university to work actively with sustainability.

Studies looking at student and staff attitudes towards, and skills for, sustainable development in the UK consistently show that a large majority of students believe that it is an important part of a university and want their institution to do more on sustainability.

As sustainability is becoming increasingly recognised within businesses and workplaces, with often mandatory requirements for organisations to meet specific sustainability criteria and/or report on their impacts, employers are looking for graduates to leave universities with an understanding of sustainability, and the skills to support the business to thrive into the future.

The degree of engagement with sustainability within the university itself can vary, perhaps creating more focus on operations (eg food, water, energy) or teaching (eg with a sustainability programme) or student action (eg with a funded student project). Some universities respond by forming separate sustainability departments, others attempt to integrate sustainability within already existing structures. Having a good engagement with educational sustainability does not necessarily mean operational sustainability works well, and vice versa.

A 'sustainable university' strives for change in all areas, **creating a space for transformation, reflection and critical debate** on broad societal and planetary issues through scholarship - learning and research:

- A 'sustainable university' contributes actively to its local community as well as to global knowledge.
- A 'sustainable university' provides leadership in sustainable practice through its estate and processes.
- A major aspect of a sustainable university is encouraging everyone in the university to explore what they think sustainability might look like, to critically debate this and to act in what they believe to be sustainable ways.
- A sense of community within the university helps to generate collective action towards sustainability.

Transition Universities can help institutions in the journey towards more sustainable universities by encouraging a **university community response to sustainability challenges**, enabling all students and academic and non academic staff to contribute together, often linking the different areas of sustainability and in some cases assisting the university community to work better with the wider community. Not only does this improve environmental sustainability, but also provides a platform for **social sustainability and justice** to be addressed.

The Transition movement is demonstrating how successful and inspiring community-based initiatives can envision and take practical positive steps to a better, healthier, and more fun future, making local communities more sustainable and resilient. Transition Universities use the same core values and tools as the rest of the Transition movement to create positive empowering change within the university community.

This guide serves as an introduction to what Transition Universities have looked like and achieved so far. We call them Transition Universities for simplicity's sake, but recognise that **they can be called something other than Transition**, and don't necessarily have to take place in a university, but in any tertiary education institution.

This guide is written for anyone within such a setting who wants to take **positive practical action** on sustainability.

So whether you're a student, academic staff member, a librarian, post-doc or head of catering (or better still, perhaps you are all reading this together), this guide is for you. We hope it proves an inspiring and catalysing read.

This short video, by Daihachi Yagi, gives a great taste of some the activities of Transition University of St Andrews.



The Transition name is not needed to do Transition projects!

The name "Transition" is not necessary. There are many universities that have fantastic sustainability projects that don't call themselves Transition. Don't get stuck on the name. In this guide we will refer to the sustainability initiatives as Transition Universities for simplicity's sake, but this does not imply that it is not applicable to other initiatives or projects.

It's holistic

A Transition University is a holistic approach to sustainability within a university and its surrounding community, looking at how sustainability can be integrated in operations, research, education, governance etc. It tends to involve academic and non-academic staff, students, Estates/Facilities management teams, and in some cases also local community members, and its projects can embody many different aspects of sustainability and resilience.



It's practical

The projects of a Transition University tend to focus on positive, practical action, such as building community gardens, local bike or car sharing schemes, re-use and upcycling projects, awareness raising on climate change, peak oil, and malfunctioning economic systems, reducing personal and institutional carbon footprints.

The advantage of running practical projects is that they do not require participants to self-identify as "greens", "environmentalists", "engaged citizens", "socially aware" or anything at all. Practical activities are an open, inclusive way to engage with a broad segment of the university community. Over time, engaging in activities that allow them to live a more sustainable lifestyle can empower participants to develop stronger pro-environmental attitudes in other aspects of their lives and develop a positive, "green" identity.

Here are some examples of activities that Transition Universities have undertaken:



The food hive at the **University of Stirling** is a food cooperative run by students which orders organic food in bulk from a sustainable wholesaler. Apart from getting access to good, relatively cheap food, students involved gain valuable organisational and management skills.



The community garden at the **University of St Andrews** is a space to learn about gardening and permaculture. Volunteers run the garden and in return get to harvest and eat its produce. It serves as an important social space where new friendships can be formed between students, staff, and local community members. It is also a popular space for potlucks (shared meals), music sessions, and art projects when the weather permits.



Various bike projects at **Heriot Watt University** encourage students and staff to use and take good care of their bikes. Being a campus-based university outside the city, many people in the university community commute by bike and find the maintenance projects particularly helpful. There are also bikes on loan and good maps to borrow for a weekend adventure.



The SHRUB at **Edinburgh University** provides a space to swap, fix and buy, at a very low price, everything from clothes to electronics to kitchen pots and pans.

It's personal

Transition is not just about projects and the outside world, it is also about changing the way we relate to the world and each other, and about considering the values as well as practices of the world in which we live. Changing our worldview from separate to interconnected, from scarcity thinking to enough for all, from competitive to collaborative, all form part of the Inner Transition landscape:

As individuals, we may experience a wide range of emotions as we imagine and work to build the future we want – or fear a future much worse. For many, the scale of the problems is simply overwhelming and distraction or denial feel safer. Inner Transition is designed to help support us face a world that is changing faster and more profoundly than most can imagine or absorb.

It's designing resilient groups

It is not only about what we do, but also how we do it. It is not just about delivering carbon reduction or cutting food miles, but learning how to design a sustainable and resilient group that remains energised, motivated, and inspired, and can deal with conflicts and personal issues in a constructive and meaningful way. Typically, a participant in a Transition University project will not only learn the practical skills for sustainability, but also social skills to help them engage with others, carefully exploring how these skills influence their own and others' well being.



Transition University of St Andrews use some of their 1.5t of veg harvest in promotions and for community cooking events. Here a competition winner is presented with a local food good-bag. Photo: St Andrews in Bloom.



Transition Edinburgh University members out and about. Photo: Transition Edinburgh University.

It's responsive to its community

Ideally, Transition Universities are responsive to the interests and priorities of the members of their community. What defines a Transition University community is very much dependent on the people involved and can take many forms, for example:

- *It can be a community of place* - perhaps just consisting of the people who are on university campus every day, or even just in a specific building, or indeed include local residents living in the town/neighbourhood/city
- *It can be a community of interest* - consisting of all those people who share a common interest in specific sustainability areas, such as food growing, bike riding, or social enterprises.
- *It can be a community of values* - made up of people who share broad values and ideals

Most probably it will be a combination of these. But as a result the Transition University community can refer to:

- A particular grouping or project within a university
- The whole university
- A particular group or project within a town/city that incorporates representatives (students, staff, or both!) from a university

The important thing is to make sure that the priorities and interests of the Transition University community, however it is defined, are listened to and continually inform the activities of the Transition University.

It takes on some university characteristics

Transition Universities often demonstrate the following characteristics that may distinguish them from other town or community based sustainability projects, particularly because of the nature of tertiary institutions with a strong teaching aspect.

- **Seasonality** - the academic year imposes a rigid time structure for projects and engagement. For example, many students leave the university community during winter and summer holidays, and are extremely busy during exams, so it is difficult to get any engagement in projects during these times
- **Authority** - any projects taking place in, being organised by, or involving a university may need to be approved by some authority within the university structure, which to some extent limits the "Just Doing Stuff"-nature of projects taking place in the university
- **Transient community** - many people relocate to attend the university and only stay for a few years. They do not necessarily have any long-term investment, whether it be in terms of money, interest, time, or energy, in the place around them. Successful projects and initiatives therefore tend to focus on skills, ideas, and values that can be of use in different places and environments, as well as promoting the development of structures to ensure continuance of any long term projects or initiatives at the University over successive generations of students.
- On the other hand, universities are a place where young people "come of age", make big decisions about the type of person they want to be and form lasting behaviours, friendships and convictions. So the community may be time-limited but the engagement with it is often very intense.
- **Thinking** - because of the emphasis on critical analysis and engagement with literature at any university, Transition University projects are often highly reflective and produce new thinking as well as practice in the pursuit of sustainability

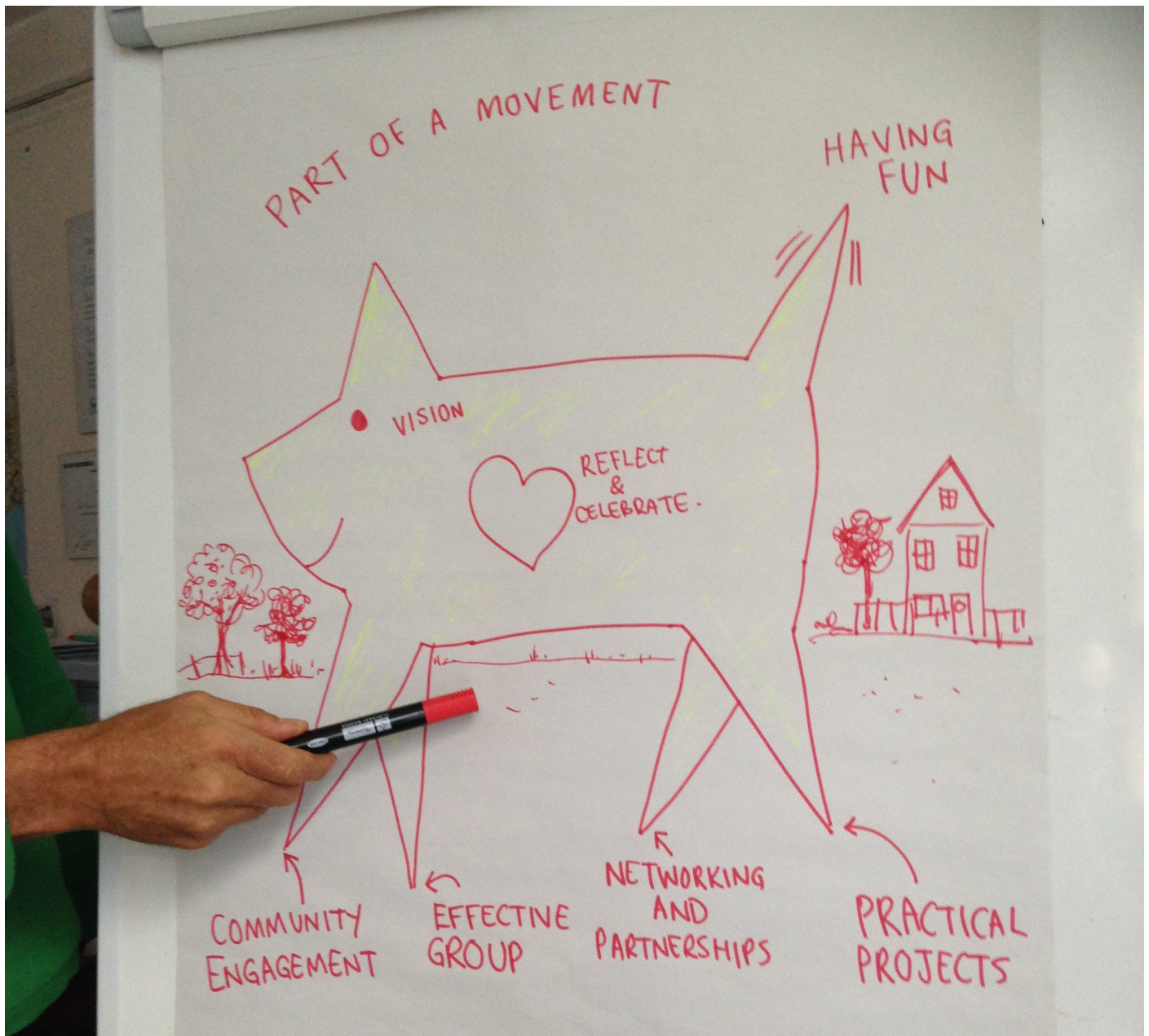
It's unique

A Transition University can take many different forms and no two are the same. It is up to you to define your own vision of Transition in your University.

This is why the definition of a Transition University needs to be open and flexible, so that different groups have the opportunity to define themselves and adapt to the particularities in their communities.

The Transition Animal

If a Transition University were an animal, this is what it might look like:



A Transition University is functioning well when it is taking account of all its needs as identified by the Transition animal:

- It has a clear **vision** of what it wants to achieve
- It is an **effective group** that works well together and has good structures in place
- It works in **partnership** with others and it **networks** with other groups
- It is embedded in its community through the **community engagement** work it has carried out
- It is carrying out **practical projects** in its community
- It is exploring the **Inner** dimension of Transition
- It is linked to other Transition Universities / Transition Initiatives so feels part of a movement
- Most importantly people are **having fun** and enjoy being involved in it.
It **REFLECTS** on the work it does, learns from these reflections and **CELEBRATES**

Why start a Transition University? There are many reasons, here are some of them...

Benefits for Individuals

Learning important life skills

Through the Transition University projects awareness of sustainability and related topics is raised. Staff and students learn skills that are not necessarily traditionally covered in the curriculum, but are extremely important in living a sustainable life, contributing towards social change, and creating a better future. Whether it be making the perfect hot compost or learning project management and applying for funding, the opportunity for learning by doing and practical engagement is an important complementary aspect to a university education. Some might be motivated for the extra edge this gives the CV, others by the boost in personal development, and others again for the love of the job at hand.



As major landowners, Universities can have a big influence on local biodiversity and landscape. Transition University of St Andrews planted over 1200 food-giving trees across the campus in 3 years. Photo: St Andrews in Bloom.

Improved mental and physical health

As students, staff, and local residents take part in projects (such as those involving cycling or growing food) overall health for them and the environment is improved. It is a valuable part of what is normally a very stressful academic environment and provides an important part of any mental wellbeing programme. Participants' mental health improves through deeper engagement with nature and the physical environment around them, increasing their sense of belonging and developing an understanding of how it impacts on resources and lifestyles. Emotional wellbeing is also helped through engaging in activities with clear and positive purposes with tangible outcomes.

New and expanded social relationships

Free time is enriched with interaction with people from different age groups and social backgrounds, expanding and diversifying interpersonal relationships.

Student and staff economic benefits

Through learning how to save energy, grow and cook good food, repair items, take part in swaps and exchanges, etc., there are ample opportunities for saving money and energy.

In addition, engaging with a peer group which rejects materialistic values and excess consumption can help participants in Transition Universities resist the social pressures to adopt high-consumption lifestyles.



Excess produce from the community garden is turned into a free lunch during busy exam times in St Andrews. Photo: Transition University of St Andrews

Scholars and change agents

The role of an academic is not only to produce papers for elite peers, but also as a change agent or a social commentator, facilitating critical reflection and change within local as well as wider societal contexts. Transition Universities help provide staff and students with a connection to the 'real world' and the opportunity to debate and engage in topical issues, which is especially interesting for students (and academics too perhaps) who often don't see any relevance/purpose in their academic inquiries besides getting a grade.

Benefits for University

University institutional benefits

These range from a more efficient organisation and streamlined management in areas such as energy and waste, to feeling the added benefits of being recognised as a pioneer in university sustainability. As an example, in the UK the Green Gown Awards have been awarded to Transition Universities, attracting funding, staff, and students. University engagement targets based on student satisfaction are also more readily reached.

University business case

Having a Transition University makes financial sense to a university as the practical projects often manifest in carbon, energy, and money savings for the institution. This can secure important buy-in from the Principal's/President's/Rector's Office and the Estates/Facilities Management teams.

Academic research opportunities

A Transition University can be a platform where critical reflection interacts with practical implementation - providing exciting possibilities for researchers interested in sustainability. It also gives potential inspiration and opportunity to students wishing to delve deeper into or write dissertations on sustainability topics. This can contribute to getting buy-in from senior level academics but also makes Transition Universities rich ground for new thinking as well as practice.



Linking academic research and local practical action are a vital part of what Transition University of St Andrews aims to achieve. Photo: Transition University of St Andrews.



The first vegetable harvested from Albany Park Hall Garden was taken by this young local resident and his mum. The growing space at St Andrews University acts as a meeting point between the community and university. Photo: Transition University of St. Andrews.

Social resilience

A Transition University provides opportunities for interdepartmental and intergenerational interaction and relationships out of the established hierarchical structures that may dominate a university. A highly positioned academic staff member can dig potatoes on equal terms with an undergraduate, while an Estates/Facilities Manager can get to know and understand the neighbouring local community members. Opportunities for discovering new pathways and ways of exchange help people adapt to changes from within and outside the university.

Efficient use of staff and resources

By drawing on the available skills and energy of a community of volunteers, student interns, full-time staff as well as interested academics and operations staff, Transition Universities can be both more effective and efficient than initiatives taken forward by one sector of the University community. Their flexible structure can deliver things as diverse as doing research to cleaning out sheds. This makes it attractive to invest in, both for the university management and potential external funders.

Improved community relations

Relationships with the wider community are often improved through the Transition University as it increases interaction and exchange between university staff/students and local community members. It leads to more integration and can become an important part of the university's strategy on community engagement and sustainability. The Transition group can feed into the university their own ideas and priorities, and support them be realised. It will improve community relations, but also give brilliant suggestions for potential ways forward. Some projects create events or outcomes that are good for everyone e.g. a skillshare open day or a community garden.

External benefits of starting a Transition University



Transition Edinburgh University's Harvest Festival: Photo; Transition Edinburgh University.

Helps achieve behaviour change

A University is fertile ground for spreading ideas on sustainability and the Transition approach. It is a structure that catches people at the point in their life when they start making their own choices about how they live their life, and so getting someone engaged with Transition / sustainability ideas at this stage has the potential to really influence them in the long term. If we take Doppelt's 5-stage approach to achieving behaviour change (Disinterest-Deliberation-Design-Doing-Defending), the analytical and argumentative focus of university studies are conducive to at least the first three stages. These stages of change are not necessarily visible, but require a secure environment with space for information and discussion. Consequently, many important first steps to a sustainable lifestyle can be made at a Transition University.

Spreads the ideas of Transition

Knowledge, values, and skills obtained at a Transition University will be spread around the world. Most students who engage with the Transition University will travel, study, or work elsewhere, taking the Transition ideas and practices with them. A Transition University is a powerful tool in spreading the Transition values and ideas. Moreover, graduates may enjoy positions of influence in the wider world and, perhaps, might just help to bring these values closer to the leaders of tomorrow.

Wider academic and policy influence

Having Transition ideas and practices within an academic institution can mean they get incorporated into its teaching programmes and research agendas. If academia is consulted by policy makers, there is a possibility to also bring a Transition perspective, depending on national politics of course. At any rate, there can be an academic debate about Transition, raising consciousness about this way of thinking in realms that are perhaps not familiar with it.

Introducing four Transition Unis...

Transition Edinburgh University



History

Started in 2009 as an initiative from staff and students connected to the student People and Planet society. Early projects included getting the university to formally sign up to externally defined climate commitments and host visits to local food projects. The initiative wound down in 2011 after funding for the initiative's staff ended. Instead, it became the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability within the university, which continues to work on campus sustainability today.

Achievements

They produced a first report, *Footprints and Handprints*, outlining their initial activities and starting the discussion around what a Transition University actually is. It has a good introduction to the opportunities and considerations embedded in a Transition University.

They also ran a series of projects such as Student Switch Off, Carbon Conversations, Big Green Makeover, FOOD, and Fair Travel, you can find out more about these projects here.



Here is an article in *The Transition Companion* (2011) about the initiative.

Transition University of St Andrews



History

Initiated by a few keen students and staff who hosted an open meeting in 2009 where key students and staff got involved and formed a steering group. Their first undertaking was to apply for funding and employ staff to deliver projects such as Carbon Conversations, waste reduction, and smart travel. Whilst the initial bid was unsuccessful, the initiative thrived and since then several other funding bids have been successful and a wide range of projects have taken place. The initiative remains governed by a steering group consisting of staff, students, and local community members. It works closely with the university but is not part of its formal structure in any official way.

Achievements

Just as a few examples, St Andrews now has 11 community growing spaces and a popular bike maintenance and renting scheme, as well as St-AndReUse - where leaving students donate their unwanted items to students starting next semester. There has also been a lot of work encouraging research and study into Transition, with support for Transition-themed dissertations and the university library boasts a good selection of literature on Transition and Permaculture.



For more information on their specific projects click [here](#).

Transition Heriot Watt



History

Initiated by an academic staff member who applied for funding for a part time post promoting active travel. As part of complying with funding regulations, a steering group was formed, which consists only of staff, mainly managers from different departments. All projects are delivered by funded staff and there is little student engagement in the governance of the initiative.

Achievements

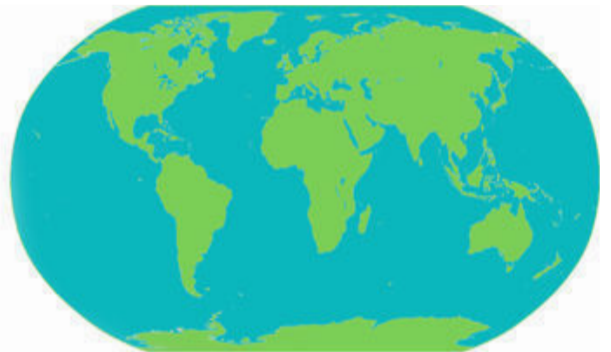
Their most successful projects include Sustainable Travel, where staff and students are encouraged to cycle the commute from Edinburgh to the university campus. On campus they have a bike hub offering bike hire, training, repair, led rides etc., making the cycling life accessible to everyone.



For more information on their specific projects click [here](#).

The Green and Blue Space (Stirling University)

THE GREEN + BLUE SPACE
"Our environmental hub"



History

Do not call themselves a Transition University, but included here for comparison. The initiative is run by funded staff who are employed through the university Student Union. It started with a local Transition group contacting the Union to run a project on sustainable travel.

The chief executive of the Student Union was interested in the idea, secured funding for staff, and is still a key supportive figure. Rather than having an overarching coordinating group, the separate projects have individual committees. Most of them are currently being turned into membership cooperatives to ensure the longevity of the projects if/when the core funding for project staff runs out. Despite being a campus university the initiative has got local residents involved, especially in the food cooperative.

Achievements

Successful projects include a Fair Share shop where unwanted items are donated and resold at a low price throughout the semester, a permaculture garden, and a food cooperative.

Transition Network Resources

You can download our guide to community engagement [here](#).

Our 'Big List' exercise is very helpful [here](#), offering a simple way to identify people and groups in your community who could help you deliver Transition.

Our Factsheet on 'Events and Fun Things To Do' will come in very helpful.

Our 'How to get and keep people involved in Transition' guide is [here](#).

Our guide to 'Planning and putting on events' can be downloaded [here](#).



For more information on their specific projects [click here](#).



Two Transition University of St Andrews students swapping goods using a Local Exchange and Trading System.

5 Star
Dust
Tomatoes
£1.95 for
100g





2

Nuts & Bolts: How to create a Transition University

This second part of the guide provides a more hands-on approach and explanation to how Transition in universities has been done.

Universities vary widely as do their communities, which means that each Transition University group will be different. This is not a prescriptive route that needs to be followed to become a Transition University, but more a set of suggestions to help you form your own path. Perhaps you are a group of only students, perhaps only of university management, perhaps a mix?

We have put different ingredients you may wish to consider in your Transition University in a circle. They will be presented in a linear fashion in this guide, but do not feel that you need to follow in the same order. The idea is that you can move between the different ingredients, perhaps revisiting certain points several times as they become relevant. Your path between the different ingredients thus creates your very own Transition University design web, specific to your local context. This is based on a Permaculture design method by Looby Macnamara (you can see an explanation of it here. Hopefully, you will find it useful both at an overarching level as you design your Transition University group, and at a specific level when you design individual projects.

Initiating

There is no right way to set up a Transition University group, as different contexts, people and Universities shape what the group might look like. Indeed, in some places you may not even end up setting up a Transition group, but instead bringing some Transition elements to an already existing group. In any case, there are some structures that are useful to consider.

Most likely you will want to have some form of Initiating group of interested people that comes together to start Transition. Think about the groups and existing structures within the University, and where you might find people who care about the ideas within Transition. You might need to explain the Transition ideas to them as they might not know the term, but there should be a range of people who would be keen to be involved.

Once you have this initiating group you can begin to get Transition going. This work can be considered part of a general surveying phase of your Transition University journey, and we have grouped it under the following topics:

- **Dreaming:** Observing where the energy flows
- **Identity:** Defining your Transition community
- **Patterns:** Identifying key people and projects
- **Vision:** Deciding on and defining ideas

Transition Network Resources

On the Transition Network website in the support section there are the following resources under the **How to start Transition** section:

How to start Transition: Developing an initiating group - overview of how to setup an initiating groups, lots of good tips in there that can help a Transition University project

And under the **Healthy groups** section:

How to run effective meetings - a guide

Guide to decision-making - overview of the different forms of decision making you can use as a group



We will delve into each topic a bit deeper and explore them, as well as suggest some exercises that can help and you can approach them in any order.

Dreaming - Observing where the energy flows

If you have read this far, you probably have some dreams and goals about what you would like your university to look like. Sometimes we can get very locked in our way of approaching what is possible, so it is important to take the time for dreaming.

If there were no constraints, what would your university look like?

This does not necessarily mean that you have to produce a formal vision statement or anything like that, but it is a reminder to open up space for dreaming, both within you and around you.

What kinds of events and projects do your friends and colleagues always get excited about?
Which topics or structures always get criticised over the lunch table?
How do people tend to finish sentences they start with "If only...?"

By being open to and aware of this form of dreaming, and listening to it, you will probably be able to get a feeling for where interest and motivation lies in your university.

If people are passionate about food waste and recycling, you will probably have an easier and more enjoyable time doing, say, a composting project, than convincing people that they actually should be engaged in something different, such as bike maintenance or house insulation. Conversely, you may also want to consider the local challenges and problems that need to be solved and represent a priority: if student housing is damp, or people are struggling to pay their energy bills, perhaps a good project to start with would be low-cost energy efficiency projects and an education programme on behavioural changes which will lower energy use.

This we call going where the energy is, and it is so much more fun, thriving, and stimulating, than forcibly trying to create energy around something that isn't capturing to people.

Identity - Defining your Transition University community

Transition projects identify and harness the energy that is found when groups of people come together in some form of community.

Community is about forming relationships, creating identity and maintaining partnerships. A sense of community is often defined as being when people feel they belong, they can influence decisions, their needs are at least partly met by the community and they feel a shared emotional connection, through place, purpose or experience. Having a sense of core values and a shared mission holds community together.

Communities enable synergetic relationships to occur, where the sense of belonging and nourishment induced by the community can help motivate and drive the projects of the group to a further extent than the sum of all the involved individuals. As a consequence it is probably an important step in your Transition journey to reflect on who is part of your community.

If you wish to go further in But the university community is not as easily defined or obvious as a²⁹



Transition University of St Andrews looks after a 100-year-old orchard that has recently been opened to the community and promotes harvesting and fruit tree care to locals and University alike. Photo: Transition University of St Andrews.

What is unique about a University community?

A university is somewhere in between a business and a 'normal' community, and its members are held together by the business aspects as well as the community aspects. Discussing this in more detail White and Harder explain that universities "occupy a space between businesses, which are often tightly coupled systems with explicit goals, rarely values-driven; and communities, which are very loosely coupled, motivated by values and often with divergent goals"¹. In fact working with a university community can easily become a balancing act between the values of a community and the goals of a business; and it may be appropriate to recognise the sub-communities within your institution.

Moreover, the university is a space that brings together people from many different regions, often only for a short period of time, giving the community a very diverse and transient nature. Being aware of this can be useful when you are setting up your Transition University group and thinking about who might be involved and what their motivations are. If you want to consider this further there is a report from a workshop that looked at university communities here.

Most universities in the UK engage with their sustainability and climate change impacts on some level, supported by a number of groups including the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) [www.eauc.org.uk]. In St Andrews climate change is now found high on the agenda of University's Strategic Plan, and the Transition group links into the University's Sustainable Development Working Group charged with heading up action on climate change.

Your university community will display its own uniqueness. It is particularly helpful to understand the following:

- How the official university structures are designed to work with sustainability,
- How student or staff initiatives work with sustainability
- Which channels of communication are currently being used,
- Which areas receive a lot of engagement, and which are ignored.
- What policies, strategies and approaches are already in place to address issues around inclusion, diversity and marginalised voices.
- What policies, strategies and approaches are already in place to address issues relating to wellbeing and creating healthy human culture.

Example: When Transition University of St Andrews started there was already an established structure of an Environment and Ethics Officer being elected in the Students Union each year. This person would have a network of communication channels to the university governing body, but also to the Environment Team within the Estates department. The Transition group made sure to hang on the back of this structure through having a very supportive Environment and Ethics Officer, and therefore quickly managed to get approval and influence in many of the university's internal structure.

1. White, R.M. & Harder, M. (2013) The Journey towards Sustainability via Community: Lessons from two UK universities. Chapter in *The Sustainable University: Progress and prospects*. Ed. Sterling, S., Maxey, L., Luna, H. Abingdon: Routledge. p. 144



Transition University of St Andrews brings all the Town and University Green Groups together at the annual Freshers Week Green Fair to enable new students to get flavour of the breadth of activity across the community. Photo: Transition University of St Andrews.

When Transition University of St Andrews started there was already an established structure of an Environment and Ethics Officer being elected in the Students Union each year. This person would have a network of communication channels to the university governing body, but also to the Environment Team within the Estates department. The Transition group made sure to hang on the back of this structure through having a very supportive Environment and Ethics Officer, and therefore quickly managed to get approval and influence in many of the university's internal structure.

Hearing marginalised voices

If you want to go further and deeper in the process of defining your community, you may also want to consider marginalised voices/communities and how, unless we are conscious of these, we tend to reinforce the status quo. In light of just how deeply important a sense of belonging is to all of us - and the co-creation of healthy human culture, an important role for Transition is to pay attention to cultivating a sense of inclusiveness and an awareness around mainstream society's tendency to marginalise particular voices and communities.

This is of course complex, and it is not to say that Transition groups are, or should be, completely inclusive, but that a group may decide to explicitly exclude certain behaviours or values. You may find it a valuable exercise to openly discuss these issues so that there is transparency and honesty in who you are including and excluding in your community and its projects.



Building raised beds at the Heriot-Watt community garden, where staff and students grow their own fruits and vegetables on campus. Photo: Transition Heriot Watt.

Case Studies [Initiating]

Here are some examples of how different Transition Universities have identified their communities and their experiences of the initiating processes.

Transition Edinburgh University

Community makeup: Staff and students at the university.

Process: When starting up, the initiative was very aware of already existing Transition groups in Edinburgh, and was cautious not to intrude in any of their project areas. Their community was therefore seen as exclusively within the university structures.



Transition University of St Andrews

Community makeup: The University of St Andrews is located in a small town. Initially, 'community' was seen to be solely within the university, but over time the interdependence of town and gown was recognised - for example, the university owns a lot of land in the town, including the Botanical Gardens. and what happens on that land also affects the local population. Now the Transition University group sees its community as including students, staff and townspeople.

Process: Prior to starting, there were many environmental projects, especially from the student population. Many of the university-centred projects also influence the town residents, and vice versa, so it is a natural evolution for people with shared values from both town and gown to come together and work on projects. The sense of identity that e.g. hall of residence, departments, and sports clubs lend to people has been used when planning projects (for example community gardens are specifically established by nearby halls or departments). There are thus also sub-communities around major projects (e.g. community gardens, skillshare, bike project). You can read more detail about this initiative in White and Harder (2013).

Transition Heriot Watt

Community makeup: This is a campus-based university on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Much of its community of staff and students are not based/living nearby and it has been difficult to instil a sense of community and shared interest.

Process: The main areas of study are business and engineering and there was little prior environmental action initiated by the student body, or in fact, much interest of taking a leading role in any. Most projects have therefore been staff initiated and maintained. With the Bike Hub project, a visual space was created that people could identify as being part of the Transition Initiative, and gave more engagement.



The Green and Blue Space

Community makeup: Also campus based but Stirling is a smaller city than Edinburgh. Many students live on campus.

Process: The initiative was started by enthusiastic staff members, but there was also wide student support through environmental societies and Student Union roles. However, such groups have wound down since the start of The Green and Blue Space, with all energy going into that initiative instead. Some projects have attracted the involvement of local Stirling residents, such as veg bags and a food cooperative, but there is no plan to get them actively involved at present.



All of the Transition Universities have experienced the important connection between having a physical space to meet and socialise, and obtaining engagement, a sense of community, and shared identity. The Green and Blue Space in Stirling, for example, only started seeing widespread engagement when they were sponsored with a space in a central location by the Student Union, which they have access to all the time and use for their office, meetings, hang-outs, and as a base for some projects. Don't worry if you feel like there are few spaces where the different members of your university community naturally and spontaneously can come together and share a sense of belonging. Often such spaces are not designed into a university structure, but your Transition group can find a suitable space and establish a routine to help build the Transition community.

Patterns - Identifying key people and projects

Once you have identified your community it can be helpful to look at its patterns, in order to identify and involve key people needed to support Transition. These people are important as:

They can explain whom you need to contact when, and how. They may be able to lobby on your behalf in different circumstances, whether it be in Estates/Facilities Management to get access to land for a community garden, in an academic department to encourage and promote academic research into Transition related topics, or in the Principal's/President's /Rector's office to get financial support for employing a staff member.

Projects in particular will need support from key people in your University, as you will often have to get permissions and buy-in for things you want to do. It is helpful to have contacts in different decision making bodies and working groups who can speak on your behalf and help you comply with due process. If you are coming up against a wall in negotiations with the university it is in most cases possible to find an alternative route by persisting and approaching the right people.

As your University community will actually consist of lots of communities, it is really useful to map them out. We like using something we call The Big List Exercise. It is a simple tool to figure out who is out there in your community, and what their interests and motivations are. The basic idea is to write down all the people, groups, organisations, and decision makers that exist in your community and care about it, as well as those in your community who may not be supportive. Then reflect on how aware of and active these people are in sustainability projects, and how you may want to work with them.



The Transition UoStA local exchange trading scheme was critiqued by the "Money" columnist in the Student Newspaper as an idealistic, naive and irrelevant project. I wrote a counter article, soundly deconstructing the fallacies of the original article, which the newspaper was happy to publish. This got shared on social media and gave us more publicity than we had ever expected!



Networking and collaborating with existing groups

In most cases there are already a lot of projects and groups working on sustainability within the university. An important step is to reflect on how a Transition University initiative fits into this. At the very least you probably want to avoid a situation where you start a project similar to something that already exists, and find yourselves competing for volunteers and resources.

Perhaps you decide to join an already existing group or network, and to endorse and support it by bringing some Transition “elements” from this guide. Try to be open and transparent about your intentions, and be respectful of the original characteristics of whatever project you get involved in.

A useful approach can be to sit down and analyse the current project with the Transition University Design Web as a base. In which areas is there already a lot of activity? Which areas are missed out completely? This will help you understand how you can be of service and help you focus your energy to where it is needed.

If there is a lot of work around sustainability happening you might find yourself cooperating with several groups and projects, giving something of a Transition element to each of them. Your role can also become one of communication, making sure the different groups are aware of each other, encouraging a common vision and goal and perhaps some scaling up. It is an important job to encourage cooperation and interaction between the different groups, making sure that each project has multiple beneficial outcomes for different actors. However, while the Transition group can often see the links between various projects, the people involved in them won't necessarily agree, or see any kind of need for an overarching network. This was a tension early on in the St Andrews journey, and it may be that the Transition group has a responsibility to bring its own practical projects to the table as well.

Be aware that a Transition University can also grow to engulf other groups, which potentially lose some of their original characteristics and appeals. This happened in both St Andrews and Stirling where student People and Planet societies and also the Environment and Ethics officer in Stirling became appropriated by the Transition University. All groups tend to go through periods of growth and decline, and becoming a project or sub-group within a Transition University may be a logical evolution for some. However it is important to consider the resilience of other activity at the university if a Transition group were to engulf other groups and then decline itself!

Vision - deciding on and defining ideas

At some point during the initiating phase you may want to develop a clearly stated vision that imagines a positive future for your university and its community. This is useful for several reasons, as it:

- Provides a focus for your group and ensures you are all on the same page
- Communicates to others what you are doing and why
- Inspires local people and other groups to get involved
- Encourages people to think of new possibilities for their future

There are many experiences and insights from university sustainability projects, Transition or otherwise, that are not covered in this guide that can help to inspire you. As you are starting out, or at any point during your Transition journey for that matter, it can be nice to get some inspiration and guidance from others by looking at what other people have achieved. When Transition University of St Andrews started, they invited members from Transition Edinburgh University to come and share their experiences. There are links in the Resources section to University projects; do feel free to suggest more!

Your group may have many different elements in your vision that may contradict each other - that's fine. No one knows what the future will bring. Allow your vision to change and adapt as new people join, and the world around you changes. You might find it helpful to have a particular timeframe for your vision—5, 10 or 20 years, perhaps.



This is a simple visioning exercise you can do as a group, that has 3 stages and will help you to create a vision for your group:

Stage 1: What could change?

Split into groups of at least 3 people, each taking one or more of the following themes - and any others you want to add:

- Energy and resources used by the university (where energy comes from, renewables etc.)
- Community behaviour (recycling, energy use, food, travel etc.)
- The environment of the university (the grounds, buildings etc.)
- Equality, diversity and inclusion - particularly of more marginalised voices.
- Social and personal wellbeing of community
- Relationships with local residents
- Any other topic you can think of, that relates to your university

Have 10 minutes in your group to brainstorm things that you would like to see changed or developed in the university. Write down your answers on large paper if you have it. Don't get into arguments - if you disagree just include all the points of view. Each group then takes 2 minutes to report back to the whole group.

Stage 2: Imagine what a Transition University would look like in reality

Take 5 minutes to imagine yourself taking a tour around your community in a future time where things have gone as well as, or better than you can imagine and the challenges you have identified have been addressed in a positive way (it doesn't have to be "realistic" unless you want to be). Just imagine taking a walk and noticing what's there.

In pairs or threes, share some of the things you imagine would be in your community. Take 5 - 10 minutes for this.

Stage 3: Sharing the vision

Come back into the whole group and spend 5 - 10 minutes in silence writing and drawing on your shared piece of paper - words or images that show what you think the future might include. Make it fun and as detailed or visionary as you like! Take 10 minutes together to look at what you've created, going round and giving everyone a chance to say something about the following questions: what's on the paper - what does your shared vision include? how was it to imagine this future - what surprised you, what did you like or not?

- Together reflect on what's in your shared vision.
- Does it address the challenges you talked about at the start?
- How was it to do this process together?

Other things to keep in mind

- A vision for the future is never finished - it will always be evolving.
- Don't spend time arguing about details - instead notice where you have agreement, or where there are issues that are particularly charged for one or more people.
- Celebrate where you agree, and take a moment to feel how much uncertainty we are actually experiencing in these times.
- It is very useful to define core values that you have as a group and that inform your vision, this often stays pretty stable whereas a vision can often change to meet new demands and opportunities.

Once you have developed this shared vision you can use it to explain to people what your Transition University group is about. An example of this can be clearly seen in following vision of Transition University of St Andrews which is:

“Transition University of St Andrews is a diverse network of people motivated by a common concern for the sustainability of St Andrews and the wider world. Through partnership and collaboration we aim to create/facilitate a flourishing community that lives responsibly within environmental limits. We have a vision of a university that exemplifies the values and practices of sustainability through excellence in scholarship, operations and community action.”

Depending on its structure your coordinating group will probably experience a lot of change-over. A majority of new members coming in on a yearly basis is not uncommon. Many people will come to the Transition coordinating group without having a clear idea of what Transition is.

This is why a vision document is important, as is having regular opportunities to openly discuss and revise the mission, aims, and values of the group. This helps promote ownership for new members and to make sure that the group is responsive to the ever-changing nature of the university community. It is a good idea to develop a habit of revising the mission, aims, and values on a regular basis, perhaps even every year if turnover is very high, which tends to be the case in a student context.



Used coffee grounds
for your garden.....
or your face

TRANSITION
 **HERIOT-WATT**
Our low carbon community

Evolving

One aspect of your Transition University journey will be to establish your group, your ways of working, and your place within the university community. This work can be considered part of a general designing phase, and we have grouped it under the following topics:

- **Engagement** - getting others excited and involved
- **Governance** - establishing a core group
- **Funding** - bringing in external support

Engagement - getting others excited and involved

Engaging with others is important as it's so much easier to get stuff done if you are surrounded by supportive people and partners. And if you are good at getting exciting things off the ground, you will most likely find that you get more and more engagement, more support, more exciting projects... it's a snowball effect.

The aim of community engagement does not just have to be about getting people involved in your Transition group. It can also be about helping to shift people's attitudes on Transition issues through engaging in activities and learning more about the concept to create a positive perception of Transition.

However, getting people involved can be difficult in a university environment. It requires time, long term commitment, and a building of relationships, but it is definitely possible. A Transition University community is mainly transient and not necessarily invested in a specific place for the long-term, as new students and staff arrive every year at the same time others are leaving. There is a quick changeover of members which means that relationships, feelings of identity, and partnerships that hold the community together are formed and re-formed in short time frames. Building and re-building that sense of community becomes an important part of any project in the university. However, everyone at the university shares the same broad purpose of scholarship and has a similar experience of academia and institutional practice.

It may be useful to think about what practices already exist in your university to establish engagement, sense of belonging, and shared values, such as Introduction weeks, initiation rituals, subject-focused days, weeks or months such as Green Week or World Peace Day, and mid-year or end of year celebrations. It is also likely that the different parts of your university community will be motivated by different goals - make sure to accommodate this!

So how do you go about engaging your potential community? Again it is useful to consider the four areas that your Big List exercise looked at...

Students

Students have a lot of power to change institutions and if you are a student, Transition can help to find your voice and sing out about your visions!

Here are some examples of how different Transition Universities have gone about engaging students in Transition:

- Piggy-back on other events and have a presence at e.g. information fairs during the first week of term, post-graduate information events, any environmental festivals/events.
- Approach university structures and investigate which ones can support you. Can you be in the welcoming information sent out to all new students, the library newsletter, or maybe have information boards in the university cafés?
- Have an accessible project, such as a swap shop or veg bag distribution, which can attract people.
- Invite new students into your physical space (if you have one) and make them feel like they are welcome and can return there.
- Make sure that people with new ideas can be heard. In St Andrews, this has been done through regularly hosting Open Forums, which are a creative conversation space where everyone is welcome and can learn more about the Transition group or give their input on what it should be doing.
- Some Transition Universities have had a good experience with using incentives, such as prizes for the hall of residence that uses the least energy, or restaurant vouchers for the most environmentally friendly costume during traditional university dressing-up events.
- Host easily accessible and open to all social events, such as going to the pub together, or having a shared meal. Friendship bonds seem to make for the best engagement.
- Provide formal opportunities for students, such as internships during academic year or the summer, which means they can engage and also "have something to write on their CV," which is a great concern for many.
- Contact student groups with similar aims. If there are other groups in your university community that share your aims, such as student societies or student union organisation, you will probably find it fruitful to link up with them. See the Networking and partnerships section for more information on how to do this successfully.
- Have an email address that people can contact for immediate engagement at an individual level - but make sure someone is tasked with responding to that email address promptly and enthusiastically in an appropriate tone!
- Note where people talk about activities on campus - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Blackboard, mailing lists or somewhere else entirely - and establish a profile that explains what you do and why, and post relevant information, including directly linking with identified partners, to build up a following. Once you have a network to communicate with online, use this to keep those interested in what you do in the loop and get them more involved. Remember that communication is two-way, and take time to respond to any contact others make with you.

Staff

It is important to have academic and non-academic staff on board because they can provide a bit more continuity and a different form of input. Getting staff involved can be tricky, but the division between staff and students can sometimes be rather artificial. Recognise that there is a spectrum of different kinds of people who can be classed as staff. Some of them are likely to be staying for a very long time, teaching, doing research or working in Estates/Facilities Management, whereas PhD students and post-docs are more short-term. They may be new to the community, have no social connections but lots of energy.

One important thing that you may want to address if you are engaging with academic staff volunteers is the tendency for there to be strong external influences for academic departments and research communities which mean they may be hesitant to get engaged. Some fear that they may be accused of losing academic objectivity; and activity spent in practice may be seen to be to the detriment of an academic career. This is a wider debate in academic circles, but if you are aware of it and can provide space for it to be discussed you may find that academic staff are more comfortable.

The following outline some of the strategies that can be used specifically for engaging staff:

- Make sure the timings and locations of meetings and events are accessible to staff. That often means holding them during working hours in or close to university buildings. Staff members are much less likely to be able to come to a late night meeting in somebody's student flat
- Academic staff often have too much to do. Can you link in with what they have to do anyway? That could be strengthening teaching opportunities or providing research possibilities. For example, at the University of St Andrews there is a sub Honours theme on Institutional Sustainability Strategies, using the institution as a case study and inviting lectures and talks from people engaged in sustainability practice, including Transition
- Host lectures for academic groups and departments, investigating and inviting a debate around how Transition can relate to that area of study
- Encourage or support an environmental staff network
- Make sure that at least some of your projects and activities can cater to families and children, e.g. offer childcare during workshops, or have children's area during evening events
- Link in with the latest debates on university impact and community engagement and show how Transition can be a vehicle to support these.

Local Residents

Depending on your context you may also wish to try to engage with local residents. There are lots of benefits from being able to vision a whole community approach to Transition, as most issues cut across both town and university anyway, such as food, energy, transport, economy and waste. Also you can find that solutions to some of these issues can be addressed through the local community and its infrastructure.

It is important to note that the local residents are not a monolithic bloc, but most probably represent a wide diversity of people.

It might even be the case that there already is a Transition group within your university's town or city! The easiest way to check is on the map of Transition Initiatives. If there is, this can be a great way to get in touch with the local community and ground your project in the wider identity of the place.

There are numerous other benefits that come from engaging with the local residents:

- You develop a much larger Transition community, which importantly helps level out the capacity of the group over the seasons and brings a longevity, which is especially good for long-term projects and maintaining institutional memory (avoiding loss of good practice when students move on)
- Local residents may have good relationships with (or be part of) local businesses, the Town Council etc., which can bring a wealth of new opportunities or unlock doors
- The benefits of local knowledge and a skill set that is not necessarily available in a University full of mainly younger students
- Some local residents may have more time, or be available at other hours, such as retired people, or those at home with small children
- Much greater access to funding and support from agencies

There can also be problems with engaging with local residents and other issues that need to be accounted for such as:

- The Transition University group can become overstretched
- The local community perceptions of the group's aims
- Having the right insurance for working out in the community
- Ensuring compliance with the charitable aims of the university
- The University and local community having conflicting agendas
- Permissions to use land (tenure).

Here are some ways that you can engage with your local residents:

- Check if your university has outreach lectures and offer to contribute to them with the help of academic staff. For example, at Transition University of St Andrews they have given talks on sustainable food and other issues to an active group of largely retired but influential people in the town
- Contact local groups that are interested in sustainability issues, perhaps to introduce yourself and arrange to meet, or invite them to an event or meeting
- Support local campaigns and weigh in (judiciously!) on local issues, when appropriate. In St Andrews, the Transition group gained respect in the wider community by writing an open letter to the University in support of the Botanic Gardens which was published in the Friends of the Botanic Gardens newsletter
- Get involved in local events, for example, having a table at a local food fair
- Put on events in the local community, rather than always using university venues
- Set up projects in conjunction with the local community, such as supporting the local Botanical Gardens by encouraging students to volunteer there as part of a nature connection project

Local resident engagement can take many forms. It might be useful to look at the Transition Network guides (listed at end of this section) on community engagement to see how Transition Initiatives do it in their communities.

Estates team and operational staff

Other than all the individuals making up the Transition University community, there are some key groups that you may want to specifically engage with. One such group is the Estates team/ Facilities management and operational staff.

Many academic staff and students ignore the teams who keep the university ticking along, making sure the buildings are functional, the food is served, the heating is provided, and the grounds are maintained. But these teams have a lot of experience and knowledge. Here are some ideas for how to engage with them:

- Respect and acknowledge their inputs and limits. Depending on their role, they may have a lot of knowledge on practical issues (e.g. how many chairs can be fit into a given room, where the best place would be to store food for an event), but have less control over what you are and aren't "allowed" to do. Don't ask them to do things that put their job or reputation on the line!
- Take the time to meet and develop working relationships with individuals
- Help them find routes around problems (e.g. can't give permission to use land for a community garden)
- Be strategic - find the right person!
- Make sure you have the capacity to work with them during their working hours
- Align your projects with theirs. If they want a particular area to be tidy and public facing, situate your community garden elsewhere. If they want help reducing student energy use, offer to facilitate an activity to support this goal

Office Support (from Principal, President, or Rector)

Since you most likely will be working under the authority of the university's governing body and the Principal's/President's/Rector's office, it is a good idea to think about how you can maximise this relationship and gain support. Here are some ideas:

- Speak the language of principal's office. Senior management (the Vice Chancellor, the Principal and all in office) love to see positive publicity for the institution. Make sure you send out press releases to highlight the wonderful work happening in the university, helping to make a positive association between the university and sustainability initiatives
- Help them see how your vision concurs with theirs, by using language around community and engagement and energy and money saving as well as more flowery values statements
- Get the students on board. Senior managers care about what students say. Make opportunities to get the managers involved in symbolic action such as planting a tree for sustainability or making a Green Week pledge

It can be critical to get at least one ally in senior management to help you overcome bigger structural barriers. By having this as well as grassroots sustainability enthusiasts you can create a virtuous cycle of sustainability action on campus².

2. Ref: White, R.M. (2013) *Sustainability Research. Chapter in The Sustainable University: Progress and prospects*. Ed. Sterling, S., Maxey, L., Luna, H. Abingdon: Routledge. p. 187



Transition Edinburgh University's Harvest Festival, 2010. Photo: Transition Edinburgh University.

Transition Network Resources

On the Transition Network website, in the support section, there are the following resources under the Community Engagement section:

Planning and putting on events: a guide for putting on great events

How to run Open Space events: a guide for running open space sessions

Events and fun things to do: suggestions for community engagement events



Governance - establishing a core group

At some point around here you will probably have a good idea for which people will be interested in supporting your Transition initiative, and it is likely that you are well on your way to establish a Core Group holding the identity and vision of the Transition University. Some initiatives call this a steering group or coordinating group.

The benefits of having a core group can be outlined as:

- It provides a central place to contact for students, local community, staff and Estates/ Facilities Management departments
- It holds responsibility for Transition in the university
- It has a holistic vision of Transition in the university; it is the place/group where people can come together to plan Transition activities
- It helps make sure that Transition projects are on track
- It provides continuity throughout the years

Often these groups have a constitution that outlines their roles and responsibilities, which is useful because it:

- Outlines the group's accountability to its members and the community it serves
- Defines whether it is independent from the university or part of the university structure
- Specifies how the membership of the group works and what power people have within it; for example if university staff representatives have other commitments than students
- Explains the process for changing the group's aims and objectives or constitution
- Defines how people join the group, how they take up certain roles and responsibilities and how this gets changed - usually at an AGM

Constitutions also have other purposes. They can be a necessary requirement for applying and securing funding. Universities have to abide by regulations concerning climate change and are under pressure to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies, so if you have a constitution that addresses similar concerns, chances are you will get more support from the university.

The vision exercise explained earlier on can be a useful tool to help shape your constitution. Here is an example of how the group at St Andrews saw their vision and mission, and how they developed it.

There can be tensions between how you want to govern your Transition University and the way universities are governed. University governance is often based on an endless growth and expansion logic, in which it may be difficult to place a Transition group. It also tends to be run in a very top-down and hierarchical manner, centralising power and responsibility for the sake of efficiency. If you choose to be within the university structure (if you even have a choice!), you may find that certain aspects of your Transition group will be compromised. On the other hand, if you place your Transition group completely outwith the university structure you will most probably be struggling to get access to and influence over university procedures.

Spontaneity and strategy: co-designing a process for sustainability action at the University of St Andrews

Rehema White, Joshua Msika, Morgan Buckner, Lukas Bunse, Rhona Maclaren, David Stutchfield
 Transition: University of St Andrews



Who are we?

- Transition University of St Andrews (TUSA) is part of the worldwide Transition movement.
- It was launched in 2009 by a group of students and staff and has since gained momentum¹
- We have raised Climate Challenge Funding, and a University grant to employ seven staff (some part time) to run three years of action together with the wider town community.
- Our work builds on enthusiasm and opportunism, but is guided by a Steering Group and is also linked to formal University structures.
- Unusually for a grassroots movement, we have good links with research and learning activities.

Why did we develop a strategy?

Since its inception, TUSA has felt the tension between spontaneity and strategy; change and continuity. As membership, funding and circumstances evolve, the group (re)defines itself. Periods of expansion fueled by fresh motivation are followed by moments of retreat and consolidation as time and energy become scarce. We thus developed a strategy to give direction to the bursts of enthusiasm and to prioritise projects in times of retrenchment. This would also provide a degree of coherence between generations of four-year undergraduate students.

How did we develop our strategy?

We used two approaches – **Visioning and Strategy** to enable a coherent action plan to be developed using theoretical understandings of sustainable development and **asset mapping** to enable us to benefit from local opportunities.

- 1) A task group comprising 6 members of the steering group (3 undergraduate students, 2 academic staff and 1 estates staff) was mandated with developing theory informed vision, mission and strategic objectives under which existing and future projects could align.
- 2) A facilitated focus group (2 undergraduate students, 2 transition staff members, 1 academic staff and 1 estates staff) attempted to map out assets and constraints deriving from our unique context and locality.
- 3) Presentation of findings to wider steering group for feedback; modification and integration.



Mission & Vision:

Transition University of St Andrews is a diverse network of people motivated by a common concern for the sustainability of St Andrews and the wider world. Through partnership and collaboration we aim to foster a flourishing community that lives responsibly on the land.

We have a vision of a university that exemplifies the values and practices of sustainability through excellence in scholarship, operations and community action.

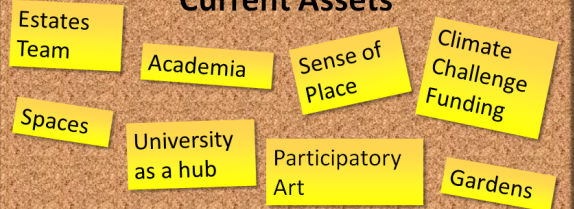


Strategic Framework

Strategic goals	People:	Prosperity:	Place:	
	We want to empower people to fulfil their potential in local action and as global citizens	We want to foster the bodily, intellectual and spiritual well-being of all	We want to support and be supported by the biological and cultural diversity of this place	
Themes for action	Knowledge:	Circulation:	Energy:	Food:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating, mobilising & implementing knowledge for sustainability • Skills exchange, research/learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less input-output • More circular flows of materials and money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy Island • Local generation • Reduce energy consumption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edible town- and landscapes • Food culture
Projects	Dissertations & staff research projects. Skillshare. Transition Reading. CarbonConversations	LETScheme. St AndRe-Use. Car-sharing.	Inter-Hall Energy Competition. CookSmarter. Carbon Conversations.	Edible Campus Project. Community gardens.



Current Assets



Potential Opportunities



Reflections on outcomes

- We were surprised by how well our strategic goals ultimately aligned with the three pillars of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental²
- But - we recognised that these goals have to inter-relate according to strong as opposed to weak sustainability³
- Our action themes are similar to the main Transition foci of food, energy, transport and waste³
- The emphasis on knowledge derived from our University context allowed us to consider how to both be theoretically informed and practically relevant; non-university groups could also benefit from greater knowledge focus
- Strategic goals gave a strong framework to our action plan, but the asset mapping enabled us to build practically on existing strengths and opportunities

Reflections on process

- We recognise that the process was as important as the outcome in enabling reflection and social learning and building relationships
- Self-facilitation in the strategy approach was as effective as facilitation in the assets approach
- Our focus on the small groups meant we had to work hard with the rest of the steering group and Transition staff to bring them on board; wider engagement beforehand would have enabled better buy in
- The process took relatively little time and was time well invested for the long term benefit of the initiative

Conclusions

The use of both a visioning and strategic approach and identification of assets and opportunities allowed us to grow our project and people and enhance both theory and practice

Recommendations for other groups

- ✓ Rather than adopting an existing strategy, try to develop your own contextually relevant one
- ✓ See it as a process rather than trying to get the perfect answer in one go
- ✓ Start with a wide debate then ask a small task group to take it forward and produce a draft
- ✓ Don't feel you have to get a formal facilitator; you know your own project best
- ✓ Keep good minutes of the discussions!
- ✓ Develop and use your own vocabulary.
- ✓ Use the resources below to help you plan and run your process^{4,5,6}

Further Reading

¹White & Harder (2013) Chapter in *The Sustainable University* Ed. Sterling et al. Abingdon: Routledge. ² Blewitt (2008). *Understanding Sustainable development*. London, Earthscan. ³ Dietz & Neumayer (2007) *Ecological Economics*, 44, 437-426. ⁴ Transition Network <http://www.transitionnetwork.org> ⁵ Sarkisian et al. (2009) *Kitchen table sustainability* London, Earthscan. ⁶ Chambers (2002) *Participatory workshops*. London, Earthscan.

Acknowledgements

The many participants in this project, especially steering group and staff members. Climate Challenge Fund Scotland for part funding; University of St Andrews for part funding.

Case Studies [Structures]

The following outlines the different structures that have been tried out at different universities to give you some further insight into what structure you may develop:

Transition Edinburgh University

Structure: Used to have a steering group consisting of staff and students. Since funding for the initiative ended the group has been swept up into the Estates unit of the University, and formed the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability.

Challenges and opportunities: The university funds staff members in this department, and many projects are still ongoing. However, the internal funding and top-down management that entails has meant that much of the student momentum has been lost. This structure also means that a lot of time is spent on monitoring indicators, since that is what the university audits to measure success.

Transition University of St Andrews

Structure: Is a constituted group with a steering group consisting of students, academic staff, estates staff, and local residents. Students form the largest part of it. It is not officially part of the university but has good and strong relationships to it, for example by being in the same building as the Estates team. It was formed this way to be able to apply for funding to which the university did not have access and to enable free thinking grassroots action.

Challenges and opportunities: Having academic staff on the steering group has been key to achieving continuity within the group. There is a tension between the desired top-down professional management within the university and the bottom-up, creative, and free visions of the Transition group. There is a balance between following the rules that the university sets up, as well as the requirements associated with the external funding, and just getting things done. It has managed to be independent from the university to a certain extent and responsive to bottom up ideas and projects, but this has meant it has been reliant on a lot of volunteer time and is liable to institutional memory loss.

Transition Heriot Watt

Structure: Formed a steering group of academics in order to apply for original funding. The initiative was within the university and placed in the Athletics Union's structures due to internal university politics. At the moment the steering group consists of staff, mostly managers from different departments.

Challenges and opportunities: This means they have a lot of buy-in from many different departments and have good contacts across the university and potential to get things done. However, the steering group role is not voluntary but part of their paid position, which means there is not necessarily much interest or energy for the sustaining the initiative.

The Green and Blue Space, Stirling

Structure: Does not have an overarching coordinating group, but smaller committees for each individual project. The project employees are hired through the Student Union and they answer to its chief executive, who initiated the group. The support of such a senior long-term member of staff has proved important in this situation. Other union staff and sabbaticals are not necessarily supportive or even aware of the group, as they are elected on a yearly basis.

Challenges and opportunities: There is a straightforward structure to hire employees and have access to university mechanisms and structures while still being able to act in student interest and not be influenced too much by top-down governance. It is part of student services, which means it only engages with the student body through those channels and not independently.

Another structure to be aware of is that of a 'Transition society', mimicking the structures of other student societies or interest groups, such as a geography society or role-playing group, aligned with the Student Union. St Andrews considered this a number of times as it would give more access within the Union, but decided to stay independent for a number of reasons, including the charges and rules that came with affiliation as well as the desire for it not to be seen as a student-only group.

One thing to be aware of, from the University of St Andrew's' experience, is the coordinating group getting too big and becoming draining and inefficient. To avoid this they recommend agreeing on a clear structure that has representatives from necessary subgroups, holding short meetings, and having a facilitator who prepares the meetings.

Transition Network Resources

On the Transition Network website in the Support section there are some great resources, including:

Moving from initiating group to Transition Initiative core group: this guide is useful to look at as it outlines how groups move from Initiating group to a core group, lots of useful stuff for Transition Universities in there.







A Carbon Conversations Course run by Transition University of St Andrews used its final meeting to harvest apples from the community orchard and discuss local food issues. Photo: Transition University of St Andrews.

Funding - bringing in external support

Due to the transient nature of a Transition University community and the many time commitments its members tend to have, most Transition Universities end up applying for funding to engage employees who deliver projects.

Funding is a trade-off - it enables you to do more but you have less freedom to decide what you can do, as you have to stick to the plans suggested in your funding application for the grant duration. Internal funding from the university means less autonomy from the institution but can provide a formal route to influence within it. If not employing staff, the Transition University can be more responsive to the projects and interests that its community want to pursue.

Engagement becomes more natural and empowering as volunteers can define the process rather than it being a set programme delivered by a staff team. However, it is dependent on keen volunteers with time and energy to invest, and within a University this will very much depend on the time of year.

Remember that funding doesn't have to be external money coming in. One of the most important sources of funding can be provided in kind by the university itself, in forms of e.g. supplying your group with a physical space such as an office or a hang-out area, or letting you use university infrastructure for employing staff or managing resources. Having these in place can also make external funding easier to find, as these can be quantified and listed as "match funding".

The following opportunities and challenges are useful to recognise if considering getting funding to employ staff:

- It gives a sense of continuity throughout the year when other volunteer organisers of projects disappear for holidays or get bogged down in exam writing/marking
- It allows a greater volume of work to be done, there can be a wider range of projects, projects tend to be faster, impact can be observed early on, and it is easy to start new projects
- Engagement becomes easier as employed staff members have time to invest
- A lot of time is spent on auditing and measuring the impact on projects with indicators that are not always suitable or helpful
- Reporting back to funders creates a lot of extra work but is also a good opportunity for reflection and evaluation
- It questions who should be leading Transition in the university. Is it a university directed project or is it guided by an independent organisation made up of a range of stakeholders?
- Pulling in external funding has value in and of itself because it creates "right livelihood" opportunities in a world where these are still few and far between. Creating a job role where someone can invest themselves fully in Transition-type activities can make a big difference to that person's life

Employing staff

When bringing in funding and employing somebody for a specific purpose, tensions can easily arise as volunteers and employees work side by side. Take some time to think about what your role is in relation to this. Consider:

- What is the relationship between employed staff members and coordinating group?
- Who will be responsible for managing the staff?
- Can somebody from the coordinating group be employed?
- If the employed staff members are responsible for delivering funded projects, what does the coordinating group do?
- Who provides an overall direction and strategy for the Transition group?
- Who applies for potential further funding?
- Who organises non-funded projects and events etc.?

As a way of overcoming employee and volunteer tensions, you may wish to advertise smaller contracts of only a few hours a week. That way a passionate person could apply even though they may be employed elsewhere or a full-time student. This does, however, mean that you have a larger team of employees to manage, and that you won't be offering a job that can provide a full livelihood.

The St Andrews' experience of hiring staff:

- The best experience of individual employees has been of those who are invested in and passionate about the community
- There are many bureaucratic obligations towards an employee
- Use the existing university structures, such as Human Resources and Finances, to assist with all the formal business and requirements of hiring someone
- Transition University of St Andrews organised all line managers, payrolls, etc. through the university
- Of course, this depends on the relationship with these departments; sometimes it can be more complicated to go through the university!

Case Studies [Funding]

The following gives some examples of how funding has been used to set up and operate a Transition University. All of the Scottish universities, which have or have had Transition initiatives, have employed staff to deliver projects at some point, many through the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund (CCF).

Transition Edinburgh University

Used initial funding from CCF to employ staff over a summer period to map out the community carbon footprint. Now the group is completely funded by and part of the university which ensures continuity and a stable environment to plan projects, but there is also a growth imperative within the university which means the group loses its Transition identity.

Transition University of St Andrews

Have to a large extent been relying on funding from the Scottish Government through the Climate Challenge Fund. Through having a productive and understanding relationship with a senior management individual in the Principal's Office, support and funding was also secured from the university. At first this was access to office space in a university building and then later on a full-time staff member. Letters of support from the University Principal, Union President and approval of the Quaestor were also important for funding bids, that consequently were successful. Also, because the university couldn't apply for funding, the need to establish a constituted group provided a strong argument for Transition to be officially independent from the university.

Transition Heriot Watt

Relied on funding from Climate Challenge Fund and formed a steering group to secure this funding. Since that funding came to an end there has not been much further support from either university or steering group. Transition staff members are left to apply for more funding to maintain their positions, which they are struggling to, while at the same time delivering the already funded projects. They are also finding it hard to motivate to funders why they should continue to receive money when they are still not getting any support from the core institution.

The Green and Blue Space, Stirling

Was initiated when the second bid for funding to CCF from the Student Union chief executive was successful and staff could be employed. Eventually also managed to get a space from the university to serve as an office and meeting hub within the main university building, which greatly improved engagement and involvement in projects.

Others

The size, age and focus of your institution may influence your structure. For example, although Brighton University is not labelled as a Transition University, it has been successful in pursuing sustainability. But its five campuses and distributed and diverse staff and student body led to multiple hubs of action across place and structure (see White and Harder 2013).



I'm not sure how much long-term sustainability there is in project funding. I've seen it leading to young, motivated individuals, without much institutional support, working on delivering projects in the present with little prospect for the future. It really requires a capable and creative individual who can continuously re-invent projects to pull in more funding but ultimately, I believe that this dynamic is counter-productive.



Doing

At some point you will hopefully just want to ignore all the processes, governance, and regulations, and just get out there and do stuff! This work can be considered part of a general application phase of your Transition journey, and we have grouped it under the following topics:

Practical projects - the power of just doing stuff

Inner Transition - connecting and healing

Scholarship - teaching and learning

Practical projects - The power of just doing stuff

Practical projects are one of the main things that Transition plays an active part in, be it a organising, facilitating or negotiating role. They are often the aspects of a Transition University that attract people at first, engage the most people, and produce the most visible results. Besides, they are good fun!

There is of course a wide range of practical projects you can do, and each project will look different depending on its specific context. For more in depth exploration of the nature of particular projects we encourage you to visit the websites of the different Transition Universities in this guide, or to get in touch with them directly. Here we will just share a few experiences

You should be able to use the different sections and ingredients of this guide, also when you are planning your specific practical projects. Most Transition Universities report that food growing is a very successful project as it embodies many benefits at once, such as:

- Establishing links between students, staff, and Estates/Facilities Management teams
- People learn food growing skills that are valuable even after having left university
- People get fresh, local, organic veg to eat immediately
- They also help with mental health as being outside is de-stressing
- In St Andrews, a student group set up a community garden with the help of Transition who supplied the training, and negotiated with the Grounds management team, etc. A more detailed description of this process can be found [here](#)

Planning projects

Which practical projects should you do? When deciding this it can be useful to look at your university and ask some questions. Answers to these questions will help you to define your people based projects.

In many cases there are financial and regulatory requirements driving more practical changes around water and energy use, but encouraging people to develop sustainable behaviours such as cycling or switching lights off often requires a different approach.

- Is it campus-based or integrated into a town?
- What are the main areas of study?
- Is the institution research intensive or focused on supporting students in vocational programmes?
- Are students mainly local or international?
- What kind of careers are students aiming at?
- What gets people (and your coordinating group!) excited?
- What are the cultural • backgrounds and skill sets of people involved?
- What do people most want to do?
- What are strategic priorities and what are immediate opportunities?

Here are some practical projects carried out by universities:

- Reuse-Repair Cafes. Collecting and redistributing household goods within the student body has a huge demand. University of Stirling found that when they started charging a low price for items the project was more successful, as people tended to feel uncomfortable taking them if they were free
- Climate Action focused training such as Carbon Conversations leads people to becoming more engaged
- Food growing - institutions usually have lots of land. Key is to unlock this in a way that is "safe" to the institution. Tiny gardens associated with departments/residences work well
- Veg bags or collective food purchasing - good food at good prices feeds community.
- Skillshare - practical skills for life. Fixing bicycles in particular seems to be a powerful 'hook' for some people
- Waste - low carbon cooking and waste reduction
- Travel - encourage cycling, car-sharing, local holidaying, etc.
- Local economy - LETS schemes, local currencies



Maintaining small operating surpluses is a great way to use one project to kick-start another. In St Andrews, the Veg Bag made a £1 profit on each bag. This money went back into organising 2-3 community dinners per year. These were some of the best events I was ever involved with in St Andrews, entirely self-funded



Plan your work around the academic year

The time pattern imposed on university life through the academic year will also affect projects. It is good to plan for the busy times and the quiet times. Think about when students and staff are going to be the most stressed and when fewer people are around.

Universities are typically very bad at working with the peaks and troughs of energy and engagement levels in the academic year, at least for students. Deadlines and exams all come in the same week, to be followed by weeks or months of less intensive activity. This is something you can take advantage of! If you recognise these patterns, you can design your Transition activities around them. Not only will you avoid frustration when nothing gets done because everyone's too busy with their academic obligations, but you can also create projects that are not contributing to that stressful structure.

Some examples of how you can do this are:

- Writing funding applications and reports in the summer or winter holidays.
- Hosting easily accessible engagement events during the first weeks of term (Freshers' week in the UK), e.g. free stuff/food giveaways, open sessions in community gardens,
- Refraining from planning important meetings or events during exam times and essay deadline weeks.

It can be helpful to have a plan of a yearly cycle. Student unions might have one with deadlines on it as they also plan their events around the academic year - perhaps investigate whether you can share it! People and Planet developed one that can be found on page 8 of their Transition University guide. Transition University of St Andrews have made their own.

Complementary projects

It can be a good idea to investigate whether you can design your projects to complement each other, with one perhaps attracting and engaging people to another. For example, Transition University of St Andrews has run a very successful project with Carbon Conversations, encouraging participants to engage with their thoughts and feelings about climate change in a safe environment.

This has led many to realise a deeper motivation to get involved, and although the Carbon Conversations don't engage the largest amount of people, these people tend to stay engaged and take on the most important roles within the steering group or leading projects.

Find key areas where work is already being done

Often there is already sustainability work happening which you could complement with Transition. For example, the Estates/Facilities Management team are probably already monitoring the energy usage in university buildings, somebody might be revising the procurement strategy for university cafés, there is maybe already a university biodiversity plan waiting to be implemented. All of these types of things are opportunities for Transition to learn about, support, and further develop current action.

Physical location

Having a physical hub in terms of an office, a meeting space, and, importantly, storage space is essential for any successful project. It gives the project a hub to operate from, it makes it easier for people to engage as all queries and ideas can be processed in one place and most importantly people know where to go to get involved. This is something the university often is willing to sponsor your group with, if you manage to find the right person to ask. However spaces sponsored are unlikely to be offered on a permanent basis, so unless you have guarantees on this keep in mind that you might want your place-based project or decorative work to be portable if necessary.

Volunteers

A lot of projects will rely on volunteers, even if there is involvement of paid staff. It is important that volunteers feel empowered, have a say on priorities and how the project is run, especially as this work will also be competing with many other activities in students' free time. Also, practical projects are a route to getting more people involved on the coordinating group, or for starting new projects, so it's good to have practices in place that encourage them to be more involved. For example, in Stirling they have a volunteer gathering, which lead volunteers have to attend, to provide feedback about projects. In St Andrews, they have a Volunteer Interns project, which gives small formal, defined roles which volunteers can receive references for, and often produce a report from. There is more information on the project here.

Transition Network Resources

On the Transition Network website there are the following resources under the Practical Projects section:

- Developing practical projects: guide to developing practical projects
- Small practical projects for the initiating group: examples of projects you can do

Some Transition University videos!

Here is a selection of videos giving you a taste of the kinds of projects that are being undertaken by Transition groups within Universities...

First, three from **Transition Heriot-Watt** about food growing on campus:



In Part One, we hear how their Grow Your Own project was built.



In Part Two, we find out about growing and eating at the Grow Your Own project.



The final video looks at the experiences of those who took part, and what they got out of it.



These two videos from **Transition University of St. Andrews** provide a taste of how the group is approaching the support of cycling on campus:



Inner Transition - connecting and healing

Coming together to take action, support each other, share skills, knowledge and resources is fundamental to Transition. Inner Transition offers tools to help us work together, bridge differences and depend on each other more as we shift from resource intensive systems to more local lives and a greater potential to share what we have. This is an aspect that makes Transition different from many other sustainability projects and something you may want to bring in a potential collaboration with already existing projects.

Because let's face it, it can be very scary, challenging, and difficult to let go of the paradigm we were brought up in, in which growth and affluence are seen as the good life, and progress (individual and societal) is considered in materialistic terms. We are talking about re-examining the fundamental assumptions of our society - for example, it is not only about reducing air miles, but also questioning what function travelling plays in our identity and relationship with the planet. After all, sustained behaviour change happens when it is motivated by a strong inner belief, rather than a slightly altered habit.



Transition Network Resources

On the Transition Network website there are some great Inner Transition resources:

- Become stress-busting experts
- Group and personal sustainability
- Inner Transition activities for meetings

A number of short films about different aspects of Inner Transition can be seen on YouTube.



Inner Transition helps us access these difficult questions and often contradictory answers within ourselves. Understanding the process of change and our responses to it helps us to return to a place where we feel empowered and able to take action. Including Inner Transition within a project usually strengthens and deepens the project. It can be included in different ways:

- A focus on personal resilience could include sharing individual practices for staying energised and supported, offering workshops, signposting to events and groups locally. This might include peer to peer support, mentoring or home groups for Transition activists as well as local people dealing with the impact of a changing world
- Any Transition group will benefit from attention given to good process, taking care of each other, skillful facilitation, and addressing difficult dynamics if or when they happen. Resources for developing your group, and strengthening relationships can be found in the Support Offer
- An Inner Transition group might offer events, workshops, discussions or other activities to the wider community. In different places these have included gift circles, seasonal celebrations, discussions on hot topics, showing and talking about films, book or study groups and many more
- In a Transition University, where people are used to active debate, initiatives such as Carbon Conversations or a Green Film Festival can help open up spaces where people feel safe to move beyond the academic to the personal

Regular informal gatherings are also extremely powerful as they foster a sense of common identity and shared purpose that is really important for Inner Transition. An example of such gatherings are the Green Drinks in St Andrews, where once a month Transition University participants meet in the local pub for drinks and hanging out



We had a series of weekly or bi-weekly potlucks, which built a sense of shared community and allowed us to debate ideas around how to create change in the world in general and the university in particular. Sharing food and building friendships was key for recruiting new members and sustaining old members.



Scholarship - teaching and learning

Depending on the vision and constitution of your Transition University group, you may want to spend more or less time on this section. But a university exists for the purpose of scholarship - learning and research - which is supported physically by practical Estates/Facilities Management operations and supported financially by student fees, state grants, research income and to some extent commercial spinoff ideas. This can offer challenges, but also opportunities, particularly if you can define how Transition can support academic work being carried out in a way that is mutually beneficial.

This can be an interesting and special aspect of a Transition University project. You have many people all willing and expecting to learn and many young people at a time of life when they are establishing new ways of thinking and behaving. Including sustainability aspects in this learning process in and out of the classroom can be exciting. At a university, students are learning how to critically analyse ideas and the written word, creating an opportunity for vibrant debate about how they want the world to be in the future and how to get there. Students are developing research skills, offering the chance to do research on sustainability aspects or to critically review new research emerging. However, there are many practices in higher education that can be regarded as highly unsustainable, such as the commodification of education, the focus on employment to the neglect of personal fulfilment, the audit culture around targets and league tables to increase student satisfaction scores, the treatment of students as customers and academics as call centres, etc.

A Transition University can offer opportunities for staff and students to *think* about as well as *do* sustainability action. This can create a more holistic approach to sustainability, and also transcend the distinction between what students and academics "ought" to do in a university, and what they choose to engage with in their free time.

Practical ways of enhancing scholarship in this area include:

- Hosting talks or lectures by internal academics or external speakers
- Hosting a film festival and generating discussion and debate around the issues
- Hosting a mini-conference or workshop with other projects or institutions
- Ensuring that sustainability action gets into the curriculum in some way. For example, at the University of St Andrews Transition representatives talk about the initiative within lectures on institutional strategies for sustainable development; a third year class goes to visit the new ecobuild science building, looking at the techy boiler room behind the scenes; a masters class goes on a walking transect around some of the community gardens to learn about sustainable food systems in practice; first year students are encouraged to do a free carbon conversation course to support a carbon /behaviour assignment.
- Encouraging academics to do research on the Transition project itself
- Encouraging students to do dissertations on aspects of Transition
- Enabling students to present at student, practical or even academic conferences on aspects of Transition

Liaising with other research projects as long as they feed back into the intellectual discussion of what is happening within your own institution.

Academic research

What is the role of an academic in a Transition University? There is a difficulty in that academics today are not encouraged, but rather discouraged from being “activists” for sustainability. It can be challenging for overworked academics to answer the demands of external research pressures and internal teaching audits, and still get involved in practical action, or what may sometimes be called activism.

Academic involvement in a Transition University is often only out of personal motivation and can be taking time and energy away from furthering an academic career, but there is so much potential for interesting research within a Transition University!

“Sustainability research can be promoted through initiatives that stimulate partnerships, interdisciplinary debate and innovation, links between theory and practice, and institutional self-analysis. However, it may be threatened by external structures such as reductionist methods of assessing research, territorial research funding, and the audit culture. Internal university divisions, disciplinary boundaries, and management units may limit research communication and incentives”[2]

A Transition University allows exploration into how we should do research into sustainability. It also provides ample networking aspects and practical opportunity within the local community. This ties well into the learning aspects of scholarship described above.

There is also the Transition Research Network, already discussing many Transition related questions.

Teaching

As some of the examples above describe, you can include teaching on Transition projects of sustainability management into curriculum with the support of academic staff. You can encourage students to do dissertations or projects on Transition aspects by offering ideas and support. You can link to assignments or offer parallel talks. You can integrate practical experience into degree programmes, e.g. community volunteering or carbon conversations. Real world, meaningful examples can contribute to education for sustainable development, which all universities have been asked to consider.

It can be difficult to facilitate dissertations across the university. There seems to be a misconception within many academic departments that if the project is practical and applied no conceptual links are possible - this is something that has been proved differently at the University of St Andrews but it remains a struggle!

Here is an example of a research project carried out by a student member of the St Andrews coordinating group in the summer between his third and fourth undergraduate years. Through a series of interviews he mapped out the St Andrews community, identifying different interest groups, different political and economic forces at play, and different visions for the town's future. This practical-conceptual work proved useful for understanding how the Transition University group fit into the town's dynamics and predicted/pre-empted the collaboration with the St

Sharing learning

There is an enormous potential for sharing learning on sustainability initiatives within universities. In the UK, there have been several conferences looking into this very topic. Such conferences provide students within the Transition University with an opportunity to practice their research ability, organisational skills, relational and administrative skills, all important for facilitating their further careers.

One example was a Keele student activism conference. The Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges also hosts regular workshops, conferences and networking events.

There is also the opportunity within Transition Universities to visit each other, host workshops, energise and inspire each other.

A poster for 'The BIG Green Fair' on Monday 7th September. The background is light blue with a white cloud-like shape in the center. At the top, there is a string of colorful triangular bunting. The text inside the cloud lists activities: 'Bike Workshop', 'Arts & Crafts · Live Music · Apple Pressing · StAnd Re-use · Local Foods · Lots of Games and Activities for all to Enjoy !'. Below this, it says 'The Big Green Fair is the annual mini-festival for green societies and groups across St Andrews—Town & Gown. FREE entry'. At the bottom left, it says 'Mon 7th Sept 11am to 3pm'. At the bottom right, it says 'St Katherine's Lawn' and 'The Scores-behind the Library /in front of the arts building'.

A poster for 'The BIG Green Fair' on Monday 5th September. The background is light green with a white cloud-like shape in the center. At the top, there is a string of colorful triangular bunting. The text inside the cloud lists activities: 'Bike Workshop', 'Arts & Crafts · Live Music · Apple Pressing · StAnd Re-use · Local Foods · Lots of Games and Activities for all to Enjoy !'. Below this, it says 'The Big Green Fair is the annual mini-festival for green societies and groups across St Andrews—Town & Gown. FREE entry'. At the bottom left, it says 'Mon 5th Sept 11am to 3pm'. At the bottom right, it says 'St Katherine's Lawn' and 'The Scores-behind the Library /in front of the arts building'.

The BIG
Green Fair
Featuring the St And Re-use giveaway
in the School of Arts Theatre (11am start)

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Sustaining

Once you have established a Transition University project you will probably want to reflect on how to maintain its momentum. We have touched upon several ways that you do can this. It is great to keep doing practical projects and on-going community engagement activities as this not only keeps Transition alive in the eyes of the university community, but it also offers inspiration for new people to become involved. So refer back to both those sections and be creative, try new things out and most importantly make sure that people are having fun.

Reflecting on how your group is doing and celebrating what you have achieved is an essential part of Transition and help sustain momentum through:

- Understanding your impact helps you to know if you are being effective and moving towards your vision for your community
- Understanding how your group is doing internally so you understand where to focus your effort and celebrate your successes

This work can be considered part of a general reflection or integration phase of your Transition journey, and we have grouped it under the following topics:

- **Celebration** - if it's not fun, it's not sustainable
- **Reflection** - observing, learning, and reevaluating
- **Continuity** - creatively using change

The poster features a central image of a tree with a green canopy on the right and a bare, grey canopy on the left, set against a city skyline. The text is arranged around this image.

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www.ucalgary.ca/oikos/transition or (403) 270-0777

Celebration - if it's not fun, it's not sustainable

What is nice about a university environment is that there is plenty of space for celebration. There are most likely plenty of parties, festivals, and other creatively crazy events that you can be part of. Having fun and celebrating your friendships and everything great you do together is of course one of the most important factors of engagement, motivation, and overall success. You should definitely take time to celebrate the work that you carry out as a Transition University. Think about all the things you do and how you can celebrate, for example:

- Got a community garden? Then celebrate the changes of the season.
- Hold green drinks regularly then have a Christmas get-together.
- In St Andrews the Transition university group has been part of music and art festivals where people volunteering get free tickets to the event - very popular!
- Your energy project has halved student energy consumption then promote this, through an energy free party, and so on.

One thing Local Transition Initiatives do is to hold an Annual Celebration where they showcase all the work they have done in the community. They often hold a party and invite all the people who have been involved as well as decision makers. This can be a great way to have fun and build more support for your project.

Perhaps there are external structures that will do this celebration for you, such as awards schemes. Transition universities have participated in the People and Planet University League and the Green Gown Awards, being important achievements that the university can understand, boast with, and potentially use to recruit new students, making your group even more important to the university.

Transition Network Resources

You might find the [Guide to putting on an Annual celebration](#) useful. You'll find it [here](#).



Reflection - observing, learning, and reevaluating

Reflection is an important aspect of Transition, as we want to know what impact we are having and how we reach it. If you are being funded this will add another reflection requirement, in the form of reports to the funders.

In order to reflect well, it is important to have structure in place to record what you are doing. Often it will be projects you are delivering, so consider at the beginning what changes you are likely to see as a result of the work and think about how you can capture them. This is especially important when a funded employee is delivering the project.

Healthcheck

Transition Network has also produced a Healthcheck that you can do with your group that looks at all aspects of Transition. It is great to do this once a year to see how your group is progressing.

Revisit your vision

Consider regularly reflecting on what Transition means to you. It is such a fluid and malleable concept that within an ever-changing university community it can be difficult to communicate what it actually entails. It can be useful to have a yearly revision in which you take a step away from the day to day project running and engage with the ideas and values behind what you are doing. This is a good opportunity to also reflect on your vision to see if it is still fit for purpose, as well as exploring what else is going on in the external world of Transition. Further,, it is an opportunity for people new to your group to help shape a new improved vision for your Transition University.

Transition Network Resources

Check out the Reflect and Celebrate section. Among the useful things you'll find there are:

- Step by step guide to monitoring & evaluation
- Transition Group Healthcheck



Continuity - creatively using change

The nature of a university, with many staff and students coming and going, necessarily means that there will be a higher turnover of people within your group, and it may be difficult to maintain continuity, keep to a long-term plan, and maintain institutional memory (that is, collective knowledge, experience, and know-how held within your group of what you do and how you do it). Many Transition Universities struggle with this particular aspect. To a certain extent it is unavoidable and something that needs to be embraced. On the one hand you will always have people leaving your group, but on the other you will always have new people and energy coming in!

Employing staff to achieve continuity

As we discussed earlier, many universities employ staff as a way of ensuring continuity in changing community. This issue was discussed in more detail at a workshop hosted by the EAUC in 2013, which brought together people “delivering” Transition at different universities in the UK (check out the related documents and reports under EAUC Topic Support Network: Promoting Positive Behaviour and Transition: 18 November 2013, St Andrews. Many of the participants were employed to engage communities and promote sustainable behaviours within their institutions, and all of them stated they were strongly motivated by their values and had a long-term interest in the projects. Even so, as groups are dependent on external funding, which determines the remit of a project for a set amount of time, it can be hard to achieve continuity when the funding comes to an end. When there is no money left, employees who have been holding the continuity move on, and the project might collapse completely.

Managing continuity as a group

As a way of working with this nature of a university, you may want to spend some time and reflect on how you as a group are going to manage these continuity issues, and perhaps agree on a process where you can balance the new blood coming in with communicating the accumulated learning and experience from the past.

With the academic year being on such a fixed cycle, it is relatively easy to predict when old members will be leaving your group and new members will be joining it. You might consider incorporating a reflection, handover, and celebration stage towards the end of the academic year, enabling communication on how and why we do Transition Universities, harvesting and celebrating the achievements of those leaving, and inspiring and motivating those joining. And it's always fun to have a big party!

There is probably also a high turnover of people and partners that you are working with - university staff, student union representatives, other volunteer organisations, etc. One year they can be supportive and the next not at all. It may be a useful exercise to reflect on the rhythms of these relationships, and how you can work with them. For example, in St Andrews, the student body elects an Environment and Ethics Officer within the Student Union each year. The working relationship between the E and E Officer and the Transition group has been best when the candidates have been made aware of the Transition group and invited to events especially during the nomination stage.

Another aspect of this issue to be aware of is that a Transition University will be a learning process, where many new members coming in will repeat ideas, projects, and mistakes that have been done before. For anyone being involved over a longer period of time, this can be a very frustrating dynamic. Is there a way it can become a deepening instead of repetitive process?

Seeing continuity creatively

The difficulties of achieving continuity can also be seen as an opportunity for creatively changing and growing. It can make your group very dynamic and responsive to the energy and ideas of the present, rather than trying to achieve a set of ideas dreamt up in the past. As such, try not to get stuck in a stipulated intention and method of operations which is repeated year after year. Be aware of where the energy lies, and don't be afraid of dramatic change. Perhaps your Transition University will only exist for a few years, but will in that time be able to influence university structure in such a way that it will have a legacy and continue to have an impact, although perhaps not in a formal sense.

There is also an aspect of continuity embedded in the individuals who have participated in your Transition University, Transition "alumni". As they graduate and leave the university environment, they will take Transition ideas with them out into the world, into different sectors and environments. Another way to explore the continuity of your Transition University is to look at how the ideas continue to grow and manifest in the wider world. How can you support the alumni to take Transition with them into their futures? Can you explore what a Transition career looks like? Perhaps provide opportunities for Transition University reunion to see where Transition has taken them? (Just as an example, most of this guide is written by Transition



Case Studies [Continuity]

Transition University of St Andrews

Key individuals and university staff members have been on the St Andrews steering group since the very start, providing some continuity. As a consequence of being funded, the group provides detailed reports of its projects and tries to include reflections from leaving steering group members in these. This has not been enough to provide continuity however, as many new members don't bother to read the reports!

Instead, the group is trying to work with the rhythm of the academic year in this way: April (mid second semester, before all the big deadlines) - AGM with reports and stories from the previous year and election of new steering group. Old and new steering group members chat and get to know each other over shared food/pub visit. AGM (end of semester) - Old and new steering group work side by side, with personal responsibilities being handed over and informal meetings encouraged. End of semester (end of May) - Event celebrating the old members leaving. New steering group formally take over everything. On top of this, continuity has also been maintained by having one employed Transition project manager for 4 years!

The Green and Blue Space, Stirling

Stirling also has funded staff that maintain continuity. They are getting around their continuity issues by formalising volunteer roles through having clear descriptions and expectations of what each role entails. Volunteers are given trainings to match these expectations, which provides a clear path of engagement for them and seems to encourage successors to follow. Thus, a member of the community garden can become a session leader and a session leader can become the

head gardener.

They are also encouraging projects to "branch off" and become self-run student cooperatives. This has been successful with a food cooperative, and they are in the process of doing it for a community garden too. The cooperatives are separately constituted, students, staff, and to some extent local residents become members, and form their own committee. As this is still quite a new development, funded staff from the Green and Blue space are on the committee, but are in the process of training a new treasurer to achieve continuity.

Transition Heriot Watt

Has a continuous steering group as it consists of only staff members within the university and funded employees that provide continuity. They are however experiencing continuity issues with their practical projects as they are struggling to get students engaged and taking ownership over them. They are encouraging student societies to form around the projects such as the community garden to get around this issue.

Transition Edinburgh University

During the first years, continuity was maintained by funded staff positions within the Transition group and key individuals who remained involved for a long time. Extensive reports were also written to communicate the visions and achievement of the group. When the funding ran out the Transition group was transformed into a department within the university, which has changed its nature but ensured its long-term survival.



Resources

Here are some links to websites and other resources that may be useful for you:

Transition Universities (or similar):

Transition Edinburgh University

Dated material can be found here.

Now the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability

Transition University of St Andrews

Transition Heriot Watt

Green and Blue Space, Stirling University

Other Transition related material

Transition Network: Links to other Transition groups, support resources, stories of other projects and thought pieces.

Transition in Schools

Other sustainable university material

The Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (A not-for-profit charity with a membership of over 215 universities and colleges, supporting sustainability within the UK tertiary education sector).

The Sustainability Exchange (Delivered by the EAUC: Leading organisations from across the further and higher education sector have joined forces to create the Sustainability Exchange. Combining resources and experience from top sustainable development and education bodies, the Sustainability Exchange is the number one resource for sustainability in UK tertiary education sharing a wealth of information that is available to everyone.

A new Transition tag has been set up to pull together work by Transition universities, but this resource is also a great place to find ideas for cycling, food growing, re-use and other practical projects which have been implemented in tertiary education institutions around the UK and beyond.

People and Planet Transition University Campaign

People and Planet is a UK based student network campaigning to end poverty, defend human rights, and protect the environment. They have run a campaign directed at student groups to make their universities “greener”, inspired by the Transition movement. The campaign ended in 2013 but there are still many resources available on their website.

They have a guide on how to start a Transition University with a focus on a People and Planet-society, student led approach. It is not related to the wider Transition movement, but provides some useful practical tips.

People and Planet now host the University League “the only comprehensive and independent league table of UK universities ranked by environmental and ethical performance.”

Learning for Sustainability Scotland: Scotland’s United Nations Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development <http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org>

Sustainable-communities.eu: An online platform, developed as a part of the EU-funded TESS research project (Towards European Societal Sustainability,). The platform includes some self-assessment tools and information sheets as well as a range of case studies of community-based sustainability action.

References

White, R.M. & Harder, M. (2013) The Journey towards Sustainability via Community: Lessons from two UK universities. Chapter in *The Sustainable University: Progress and prospects*. Ed. Sterling, S., Maxey, L., Luna, H. Abingdon: Routledge. p. 144

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I feel like our coordinating group re-invented its mode of operation every 6 months or so! Every time we settled on a new structure, we thought "this should work well now", but then circumstances changed, people changed, numbers changed and we faced a new "crisis". It was exhausting! But soon I realised that this was part of our working pattern, and it didn't worry me so much anymore.



