Responsible Futures

A supported change framework for whole institution sustainability

Meg Baker - Senior Project Manager (Education)
Introducing SOS-UK

We are working to...

- Move sustainability from being a niche subject that relatively few study to something all students learn about - all students should be “sustainability students”.
- Create cohort after cohort of positive, solutions-driven students who go on to make the world a more sustainable place.
- Shift society from an obsession with short-term profit to long-term benefit.

By...

- Getting more students leading on, and learning about, sustainability.
- Embedding sustainability in formal education, from early years to adult learning.
- Making sustainability more inclusive, for everyone.
Born out of student demand

“My university or college should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development.”

Source: NUS Sustainability Skills Survey 2018-19 | Base: c.5565 respondents in higher education across the UK
Responding to growing concern...

“How concerned, if at all, are you about climate change?”
[Responses shown for very or fairly concerned]

Source: NUS Student Opinion Climate Change | Base: See brackets - respondents in higher and further education across the UK
Responsible Futures
Education for sustainable development vs. education about sustainable development

**Education for sustainable development** is the process of equipping students with the **knowledge and understanding**, **skills** and **attributes** needed to work and live in a way that safeguards **environmental, social and economic** wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations.

*Higher Education Academy & Quality Assurance Agency guidance on ESD (2014)*

“Education for Sustainable Development helps the citizens of the world to learn their way to a more sustainable future.”

*UN Decade of ESD 2005-2014*
Transforming our institutions

A whole-institution approach to embedding sustainability throughout student learning

A good practice framework and supported change programme

A partnership approach between the students’ union and the university

An accreditation mark, audited by students
Multi-faceted change and intervention framework

- Changes in policy and strategy
- Implementing requirements for ESD in (re)validation processes
- Introducing new graduate attributes

- Supporting staff innovation (e.g. teaching and learning funding)
- Professional development opportunities for staff
- Fostering stronger working relationships between the SU and institution

- Engaging students and staff in collaborative discussions
- Students campaigning for change on their course
- Course reps championing ESD in student-staff meetings
The Responsible Futures Cycle

1. Partnership joins Responsible Futures
2. Partnership working through toolkit (typically 1-3 years in the first cycle)
3. Accreditation (valid for 2 years) and awards ceremony
4. Student-led audit
5. Cohort working (active jiscmail, resource bank, peer-to-peer support)
6. Ongoing support (annual support days, monthly calls, annual bespoke visit)
Criteria overview

Baselines and benchmarks - Gaining an in-depth understanding, knowledge, and familiarity with ESD across the institution
Partnership and planning - How you work
Leadership and strategy - Institutional leadership and gaining buy in through statements of support and strategy
Policy and commitment - Committing appropriate resources to the agenda and aligning this with existing processes
Interventions - Specific interventions used to engage students and staff
Impacts and outcomes - Reflecting on impact
Outreach - Sharing what you have done
Self-defined criteria - Highlighting unique good practice

• To achieve the accreditation mark, the Partnership must meet or exceed the score threshold of 200 points, out of the maximum 300 points, not including the three self-defined criteria.

• 45 criteria in total: 10 are mandatory, 35 are optional, and of which 3 you can write yourself (self-defining criteria).

• Partnerships must complete the mandatory criteria to gain accreditation.
5 years of Responsible Futures

Over 500 actions have been taken by Responsible Futures partnerships through the programme

- Conducting curriculum audits to identify baseline of ESD content
- Passing SU policy on ESD
- Creating interdisciplinary experiences for students
- Diversifying the curriculum
- Securing greater resourcing for ESD
- Establishing living laboratory projects
- Cohort working
- Graduate attributes include sustainability
- Gaining buy-in from trustees, governors, and senior management
- Developing a stronger relationship between university / college and SU

2019-20 Launched RF Host Partnerships | 3 successful applicants - promoting a cohort approach, shared learning and a peer support network
The value in achieving accreditation

Reflections from accredited partnerships -

• Securing credibility - internally and externally
• Developing a reputation for excellence
• Enabling access to funding
• Developing new working links within the university
• Creating better partnerships between the institution and students’ union
• Enabling engagement of staff, at multiple levels, in embedding sustainability
• Securing incorporation of ESD into high-level strategy
• Embedding ESD across the formal and informal curricula

“A great experience for all involved, it has been incredible to take part in this, and I am very proud of the University & the Students Union at UWE.”

Responsible Futures Student Auditor, University of the West of England (UWE), March 2016
Committed to ensuring our students are life-long members of our University community and that our education:

• Stimulates intellectual curiosity & embeds research & critical inquiry skills that will enable our students boldly to tackle challenges in our contemporary world.

• Builds confident, critical users of information resources & digital technologies.

• Develops the ability of our students to gain, sustain & progress in graduate employment & to be successful in their next & future roles.

• Fosters enterprising, entrepreneurial & creative mindsets able to respond flexibly to complex problems & develop innovative solutions to influence the world.

• Cultivates responsible, global citizens who are committed to work inclusively with people from a wide range of backgrounds & cultures.

• Encourages ambitious citizens who are eager to maximise their full potential through contributing positively to society & the communities around them.

• Develops graduates who are aware of their social & professional responsibility to contribute to the creation of sustainable futures for all.
Ruskin modules

• 15 credit module - option in year 1 undergraduates
• 15 credits - compulsory for all 2nd year undergraduates
• **Aims to, bring together students from different disciplines around key global challenges.**
• SDG’s are a convenient way in which to frame these challenges
• Potentially relevant in all faculties and to all students

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<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<td>Lack of knowledge of SDG’s (even among senior staff)</td>
<td>Awareness raising – poster campaigns, SDG ‘Teach-in’ etc</td>
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<td>Academic staff ‘expertise’ rather than ‘outcome’ focused</td>
<td>Support sessions for staff and students on SDG’s</td>
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<td>Multiple agenda’s – employability, digital literacy, interdisciplinarity, active learning</td>
<td>Emphasising sustainability education as high quality and interdisciplinary learning and teaching</td>
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<td>Risk that the SDG’s could get side-lined in the need to ensure that we have enough modules to offer students</td>
<td>Provide exemplars which do integrate the SDGs fully e.g. No one left behind’: how can we take action for climate justice?</td>
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Launching an international pilot

- Building on the past 5 years of Responsible Futures learning and developments
- An international pilot in partnership with the International Association of Universities

Applications open April 2020

Summer 2020 - Co-design framework for pilot

Sept/Oct 2020 - RF launched in Northern Hemisphere

Jan/Feb 2021 - RF launched in Southern Hemisphere

May/June 2021 - N. Hemisphere partnerships audited

Nov/Dec 2021 - S. Hemisphere partnerships audited
Thank you

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w. https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/responsiblefutures

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