Leading Curriculum Change for Sustainability: Strategic Approaches to Quality Enhancement

Leadership Foundation for Higher Education Conference: 25th January 2012

Future Proofing Higher Education – Leading Transformational Change

Prof Daniella Tilbury, University of Gloucestershire
Dr Alex Ryan, University of Gloucestershire
Dr John Blewitt, Aston University
Pauline Ridley, University of Brighton
Harriet Sjerps-Jones, University of Exeter
Project Context

- In their **strategic plans, recognition schemes** and **funding awards**, the UK HE Funding Councils and the HEA have shown commitment to sustainability education and learning (ESD/EfS/LfS).

- These agencies are aligning with the UN Decade of ESD and other national agencies to **accelerate progress** on curriculum innovation for sustainability.

- However, curriculum innovation for sustainability has taken place mainly in the slipstreams of HE, with **patchy progress** mainly reliant on champions.

- The Project was funded through a HEFCE LGM scheme to **catalyse and upscale** efforts in sustainability education through quality systems, working at both sector and institutional levels.
Addressing Needs

*This project is about:*

- Responding to **student calls** for more engaged forms of learning to address real sustainability challenges and make a difference socially and professionally.

- **Supporting employers** wrestling with resource management, corporate responsibility and emergent risks and their need for **graduate literacy** in this area.

- Recognising the **need for all graduates** to be able to navigate and address sustainability; it is not about providing new specialist courses on sustainability.
Education and Learning for Sustainability

- It can be referred to as *Education for Sustainability* (EfS) or *Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD) or *Learning for Sustainability* (LfS).

- This means engaging learners in responses to *quality of life* issues within and across communities.

- It builds their professional and social abilities to improve *future scenarios* for people and planet.

- This requires more than just the integration of key content or issues into the curriculum – often referred to as learning *about* sustainability.

- It sees every *academic and professional subject* area as making an important and specific contribution.
Project Ambition

Bringing learning for sustainability into the curriculum and quality systems of HE – working to:

- Situate sustainability education in the quality systems and processes of five **pilot institutions**.

- Develop **strategic frameworks** and **professional development guidance** for embedding sustainability education principles into institutional QA and QE.

- Increase understanding and **build capacity** of quality professionals across the sector in this area.

- Capture **entry points and pathways** for sustainability education in the emergent quality landscape and identify its enhancement value in meeting future graduate needs.
Project Overview

Project Lifecycle = 2 years from October 2010-September 2012
Core Team = 5 HE institutions (Aston, Brighton, Oxford Brookes, Exeter, Gloucestershire)

Trying to achieve changes in Quality Assurance (QA) & Quality Enhancement (QE) systems:

- To influence University and sector-level quality frameworks and documentation;
- To pilot ways of embedding EfS into routine curriculum development processes;
- To improve institutional approaches and academic staff development for EfS;
- To develop guidance materials and CPD sessions for staff on EfS as a quality issue;
- To generate insights for leadership around institution-wide curriculum innovation.

**Funder = Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) – special stream:** Leading Sustainable Development in HE — the largest project funded on curriculum change and the only project to address the strategic educational agenda around sustainability
Project Mechanisms

**SECTOR LEVEL COMPONENTS: DIALOGUE & DEVELOPMENT WORK**

**Expert Advisory Board**
- steering the project to understand and influence the sector landscape, providing stakeholder perspectives from HE, civic and business leaders

**Work with Sector Agencies**
- consultation with sector agencies that oversee quality agendas and academic infrastructure (QAA, HEA)
- developing recommendations and guidance tools, plus capacity building activities and meetings

**Critical Friends Group**
- sourcing advice from experts in sustainability education in HE, covering different subject areas, education development units and relevant professional bodies

**INSTITUTIONAL COMPONENTS: 5 HEI PILOT PROJECTS**

**CORE PROJECT TEAM:**
- University of Gloucestershire
- Aston University
- University of Brighton
- University of Exeter
- Oxford Brookes University

**Sector Activities:**
- Planning and implementing sector level consultation and dialogue, building capacity and dissemination of findings

**5 Institutional Pilots:**
- Carrying out development work to bring sustainability education into the QA and QE systems of each HEI

**Each of the pilot projects works with the grain of their institution to bring change into different aspects of Quality Assurance (QA) & Quality Enhancement (QE):**

**QA POLICY & FRAMEWORKS:**
- QA Handbooks and Guidance
- Course Review and Validation
- New Course Proposals

**QA PROCESSES & SYSTEMS:**
- Review and Validation Panels
- Curriculum Monitoring Audits

**QE INSTITUTION-WIDE:**
- Academic Staff CPD Provision
- Institutional T&L Strategies
- Generic T&L Guidance Materials
- Work with Senior QA & QE Staff

**QE DEPARTMENT LEVEL:**
- Consultations - Teaching Teams
- Subject Guidance Materials
- Sessions with Academic Staff
Project Outcomes

INTENDED OUTCOMES – FOR THE SECTOR:

- **Engagement of sector leaders** in key roles, agencies, organisations
- Development of **guidance briefings** linked to HE quality systems
- Scoping and piloting of **professional development** needs and opportunities
- Core outputs including **findings and recommendations** for the sector
- **Raising the profile** of sustainability education agendas in HE

INTENDED OUTCOMES – FOR INSTITUTIONS:

- Legacy of **changes and development** in five institutions
- Development of practical **guidance manual** with case studies of change
- Creation of **specific briefings** on sustainability in QA and QE
- Archive of **website resources** on sustainability education in global HE contexts
Institutional Pilots

- The pilot institutions represent the *diversity of profile and provision* in the current HE sector.

- Each pilot is *working ‘with the grain’* of their own institutional strategic priorities and QA/QE systems.

- The pilots take *different pathways* in working to bring learning for sustainability into alignment with other educational themes.

- Each pilot has identified and designed *specific approaches and mechanisms* to initiate and influence organisational change.
University of Brighton

• Opportunities
  – To build on existing strong ESD ethos and embed fully across the institution
  – To develop more integrated and accessible package of support for all course development/review teams, to be built into departmental workload planning

• Barriers
  – Lengthy committee processes and overdependence on paperwork
  – Financial/time constraints on ‘deep’ curriculum development and debate

• Challenges
  – Helping academic teams to understand ESD as an underpinning framework rather than “just one more damn policy” to be complied with
  – Ensuring new approaches and technologies used in the pilot are allowed to replace rather than supplement existing requirements
Entry Point - Oxford Brookes University’s new “Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience 2010-2015”.

Recognition of 5 graduate attributes for the University. This team has successfully lobbied for Graduate Attribute ‘5’: ‘Global Citizenship: “The ability to work effectively, and responsibly, in a global context.”’ Sustainability is one of our two key ‘Global Citizenship’ pillars alongside ‘learning to live together’.

Current work: to support / guide the ‘Roll Out” of the new strategy through the mechanism of Course Re-Validation and using the new requirement for framing learning outcomes in terms of the Graduate Attributes.

Deliverables: Our work includes: 1) fostering staff ‘ownership’ of the project through workshops, 2) preparation of Staff Guidance Handbook for Global Citizenship in cooperation with Brookes’ Sustainability and Internationalisation teams, 3) obtaining additional funding for integrated educational projects.
Challenges
- Rise in tuition fees has instigated major institutional change that prioritises funding towards learning for ‘employability’ rather than Education for Sustainability (EfS)

Opportunities
- Linking Education for Sustainability with Employability

- Buy in at the highest managerial level. Clear strategy for Education for Sustainability which is part of an integrated institutional approach to sustainability

- Business School has a flagship sustainability programme One Planet MBA, this has opened up an in-route to match Undergraduate provision with expectation raised
AIM: to integrate three fields of activity that constitute a wide area of HE practice: teaching and learning, new media technology and sustainability. These fields for the most part run parallel where in fact the project attempts to demonstrate that, in terms of quality education, they need to be combined.

CONTENTION: no HE curriculum or educational leadership paradigm can be considered of high quality if it does not accommodate technological and sustainability imperatives in its quality assurance, teaching and learning strategies, management processes, administrative procedures and pedagogic practices.

- New media technologies require appropriate ICT infrastructure, e-learning pedagogic staff development and technical support from both learning technologists and IT specialists. This requires investments in time, effort and money at a time of significant organisational change.

- The need to provide high quality education for business and professions has refocused Aston’s attention on delivering formally constituted courses that inevitably cut across traditional disciplines and School boundaries, requiring co-operation within a structure that allows considerable autonomy.

- New media technologies may also, if appropriately procured, used and monitored according to rigorous sustainability criteria act as a force multiplier lowering the carbon footprint of the HEI and so contribute to reinforcing a culture of sustainability if the experience of learning and quality enablement works effectively.
University of Gloucestershire

Challenges:
Understanding responses to systematising the EfS agenda at different institutional levels:
- **Executive** = largely supportive of the project aims, in part due to its potential for strengthening institutional reputation and ensuring market differentiation around EfS
- **T&L Managers/Directors** = uncertainties and resistance, laden with misperceptions and questions around territory, modes of engagement, ‘theme’ overlaps, curriculum review
- **Academic Departments** = largely supportive, although this is dependent on inclusivity, grounded in an approach using generic principles with bespoke subject level responses

Barriers:
- Obstacles to progression of the pilot project, due to major organisational restructure and concurrent review of the entire UG curriculum taking over institutional attention

Opportunities:
- Creating frameworks that connect thematic concerns (e.g. with employability) – so as to support the move for coherent institutional approaches to T&L enhancement
- Building understanding and dialogue among colleagues at all levels, about the strategic role EfS can play to support innovation and maintain currency in the curriculum