

## University of Edinburgh ESD targets

This document was originally prepared for the University of Edinburgh Senatus Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies Committees in order to encourage debate and result in high level actions to take forward ideas already agreed as the result of a previous report into *Sustainability in the Curriculum*. The document has been edited to make it of more general relevance.

### Introduction

In this, the UN Decade for Education for Development (ESD) there has been considerable discussion about the nature of ESD and how best to proceed. The term ESD itself is a contested one. In a recent contribution to online discussion, Stibbe, the chair of the Education for Sustainability Group of the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges, wrote: *'I think it's time to stop arguing about terminology like 'education for sustainable development', 'education for sustainability', 'environmental education for sustainability', 'sustainability literacy' and so on. There will never be a term that everyone agrees with, and all can give valuable perspectives. Sustainability literacy just encourages people to think about education from the perspective of what learners gain from their experience. It's not the only thing to think about but there's no reason to close down this perspective because a few people don't like the term. So let's get on with tackling the real issues and making sure that whatever terms are used are considered critically, appropriately theorised and implemented.'* In the present context, ESD is taken as referring to activities that are within the remit of the re-formed Sustainability and Environmental Advisory Group of the University (The new remit of SEAG, which advises the Central Management Group of the University, is to provide the necessary drive, leadership and focus in order to promote sustainability and social responsibility within the University of Edinburgh). Thus ESD is taken to have environmental, social and economic dimensions including elements of social responsibility.

There are actually very many activities being carried on in the university that would be recognised as ESD. However, most are not labelled as such. While the dangers of producing targets are well recognised, it is important that the university is able to demonstrate what it is doing in this area both for internal and external purposes. The report of the working group on *Sustainability in the Curriculum* was approved by Senatus and setting targets allows progress against that report's recommendations to be monitored. Although the University's Strategic Plan (2008-2012) includes as a strategic theme *promoting equality, diversity, sustainability and social, responsibility*, within which there are strategies *inter alia* of *increasing levels of awareness of sustainability and environmental issues* and *encouraging the themes of sustainability and social responsibility in programme and course development and delivery*, there are no associated targets. The University has also recently signed up to the Universities that Count (UTC) project which will involve preparation of a portfolio of evidence on its policies and performance across a range of social and environmental issues including those related to teaching and learning.

It is recognised that in order to meet the themes of the University Strategic Plan, there needs to be a shift in focus towards incorporating elements of sustainability and social responsibility into a larger proportion of courses, while still providing specialist courses for students with particular interests in the topic, or who are potential future leaders.

### Principles

- This document refers to undergraduate, taught Masters and Diploma, Professional Graduate Diploma, Office of Life Long Learning courses and research degrees.
- Academic freedom is an important core principle so meeting targets will involve providing support and encouragement rather than direction.
- Indicators used to determine whether targets have been reached should use existing information gathering procedures to avoid unproductive bureaucratic exercises.

- A key aspect of effective ESD is the development of the intellectual skills to enable complex multi-disciplinary issues to be debated rationally, in other words promotion of good scholarship and research on the one hand and effective cross-disciplinary working on the other. Another important aspect is to ensure that the University itself demonstrates good practice in these areas throughout its activities.

### ***Some candidate targets***

This section is based on the 12 indicators of integration in the draft *Universities That Count* Corporate Responsibility (CR) Index. These are designed to provide evidence of the extent of a university's strategic engagement with CR and ESD and the degree with which these issues are embedded in the curriculum. These indicators, while formulated for the UTC project will also provide adequate measures of achievement for other purposes. The final target on key performance indicators has been elaborated.

- 1. Has explicit mention of CR/SD in overarching values/mission statement.** The University's mission statement includes the wording: "Make a significant, sustainable and socially responsible contribution to Scotland, the UK and the world, promoting health and economic and cultural wellbeing."
- 2. Policy containing commitment to CR/SD in curriculum and/or research.** This is mentioned in the Strategic Plan 2008-12.
- 3. Policy containing commitment to raising student awareness of and/or participation in SD activities.** This is also in the Strategic Plan.
- 4. Produces a Sustainability Strategic Plan containing information on curriculum or other student-focussed activities.** This is one of the ongoing activities of SEAG.
- 5. Overarching strategic plan includes aspects of CR/SD activities (including information on curriculum or other student-focussed activities).** The strategic plan lacks detail in these areas and the present report was designed in part to fill this gap. The 2009 undergraduate prospectus does include a page on *The University, sustainability and the environment*.
- 6. Publishes a CR/Sustainability, Environment or similar report containing information on curriculum or other student focussed activities.** The current series of annual reports on progress against targets includes some sustainability measures but not those relating to teaching. As mentioned above, the Strategic Plan 2008-12 does not include explicit targets in this area and it is recommended that SEAG consider how to ensure that this information is included in the annual report on progress.
- 7. Annual/ Financial report includes details of CR/SD activities (including information on curriculum or other student-focussed activities).** Item 6 is closely related to section 7 and the two should be considered together.
- 8. Has appointed a senior level CR/SD leader/champion.** The Convener of SEAG fulfils that role although the structure of the University makes it advisable that there are similar positions in each of the three Colleges.
- 9. Established Cross-departmental CR/SD steering group (or similar) specifically looking at SD in curriculum and/or teaching.** *The Sustainability in the Curriculum* working group and the current working group on targets for ESD in effect perform this role as part of the activities of SEAG. The new Learning and Teaching committee should have a role in encouraging cross School/ College initiatives of which CR and SD are only two examples. There are also other initiatives related to encouraging effective cross-disciplinary teaching, a topic that has been recognised as important by the University Academic Policy Committee. The model curricula for University of Edinburgh Degree Programme Tables (which define compulsory elements of degrees) already encourage students to take courses from outside the home discipline.
- 10. Established a focus or research 'centre' designed to progress the knowledge of CR/SD (this may be virtual or built).** The University has several forums, such as SEAG, that fulfil this role in general but there may be merit in developing a virtual group focussing on putting SD/CR ideas into practice. This group could be responsible for developing 'green' guidelines to assist course organisers. Guidance could include, for example, the co-ordination of course booklets to avoid duplication and minimise environmental impact. Making these guidelines available online would be a good target.

## **11. Holds a conference, workshop or ‘expo’ designed to progress the knowledge of CR/SD.**

These will occur from time to time. Knowledge of CR/SD should be included in induction courses for new staff, and Course Organisers’ forums run by the University Centre for Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

## **12. Developed Key Performance Indicators and is measuring performance.**

The following list indicates some of the metrics that could be used and that would be appropriate form measuring progress over time.

- The number of UG and MSc students per year who pass one or more CR/SD courses.
- The number of people who pass OLL courses relevant to CR/SD.
- The number of UG and MSc students per year graduating from CR/SD programmes.
- The number of CR/SD courses offered.
- The number of CR/SD programmes offered.
- The proportion of Teaching Programme Reviews that include information on curriculum or other student-focussed activities relating to CR/SD.
- The availability of one or more relevant e-learning courses.

While it would be possible to tag courses and programmes with a CR/SD label, experience with having an ‘environmental courses’ subject area has thrown up the problems of maintaining a list like this. Identifying CR/SD programmes is less of an issue as the number is currently relatively small. However, a large University such as Edinburgh runs a very large number of courses that may change from year to year and a better approach would be to use data already stored in the courses database. This could involve developing a query to search for courses with particular key words in the course title or description and would allow standard reports to be produced at University rather than departmental level.

There is a five-yearly review of University of Edinburgh Programmes. The working group that reviewed the Teaching Programme Review process wished to minimise the information that needed to be gathered so that the task did not become onerous. However, the inclusion of a paragraph on how the programme contributed to achieving the university’s SD/CR goals would provide a beneficial opportunity for reflection as well as helping achieve evidence for a Key Performance Indicator at little cost of time.

If all students are to be offered the opportunity to attend at least one course relating to sustainable development or corporate responsibility during their time at university then the only possibility seems to be by creating one or more courses based on asynchronous e-learning. Hence a target could be to create at least one such course for session 2011-2012.

## ***Facilitating measures***

Several measures would facilitate the achievement of the targets listed above. These include:

- Development of better ways for students to find appropriate courses through improvements to the DRPS (Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study) search engine;
- provision of appropriate Continued Professional Development courses for staff in order to provide material that can be incorporated into a wide variety of courses;
- collaboration with the Edinburgh University Students Association to identify perceived gaps in teaching provision [EUSA has already had a positive role in encouraging the University to consider ESD issues];
- encouragement to academic staff to develop cross-disciplinary programmes as it is inevitably more difficult administratively to put together programmes that span several Schools.

## ***Concluding remarks***

Discussion based on the original paper resulted in a wider appreciation of the issues. It is clear that although a considerable amount of relevant work is being carried on, it is often not well recognised. There are also

issues related to the sustainability of courses themselves such as their carbon footprint.