

Higher Education and Sustainable Development: a networking event in the East Midlands

29 November 2006, Rutland Square Hotel, Nottingham

The HE Academy ESD Working Group convened a pilot regional event on education for sustainable development (ESD) in the East Midlands, held in Nottingham on 29 November 2006. The aim was to facilitate networking amongst those involved in embedding ESD within higher education in the area.

Simon Steiner (Engineering Subject Centre, Loughborough University) opened the day, outlining HE Academy / Subject Centre work to date, in the context of international and national policies emphasising the importance of the agenda, cf the UN Decade for ESD. So far, 17 of the 24 Subject Centres had been involved in an initial phase, with commissioned research designed to: raise the profile of the ESD agenda within the sector; to provide resources for their communities; and to communicate context-sensitive best practice models. The research had identified barriers to embedding ESD that included the overcrowded curriculum, perceived irrelevance of ESD, limited staff awareness and expertise, as well as limited institutional commitment. Solutions to these were also identified in the research, ranging from curricula audits and review, staff development and capacity building, provision of credible teaching materials, and the development of a business case for HE institutions, setting out triple bottom-line benefits.

Ed Brown (Department of Geography, Loughborough University and Chair, HE group, Regional Education for Sustainable Development (East Midlands)) described the history of ESD initiatives in the region. The current group had first convened in May 2006, with sub groups established in July to work on different projects. There are now nearly 100 participants on their mailing list from schools to HE, with support provided by Leicester University. He cited the UK government ESD Panel report to the Department for Education in 1998: "It is about equipping individuals, communities, groups, businesses and government to live and act sustainably; as well as giving them an understanding of the environmental, social and economic issues involved. It is about preparing for the world in which we will live in the next century, and making sure that we are not found wanting". The major potential roles for HE in the region include dissemination of sustainability research beyond the ivory tower, engagement with policymakers, and innovative multi-sectoral educational projects. HEIs also need to look at their own footprint/role in the local economy and lead by example. This involves broadening the social responsibility agenda through, eg. looking at the type of research engaged in, and the CSR policies of supplies and contractors. The ESD group provides an opportunity to learn from each other, across disciplines and HEIs. It provides opportunities to go for funding that would otherwise not be available and enables raising the profile of ESD in the region – to become a one-stop shop for information on ESD. A website is in the process of being developed to facilitate this, with exemplars being the York and Humber ESD Forum, as well as the existing UN RCEs in Europe, Toronto, etc.

James Luger and Sarah Bentley (East Midlands Development Agency) gave the policy context for ESD in the region, outlining the East Midlands Employment, Skills and Productivity Partnership (esp) and the Integrated Regional Strategy; the regional skills framework is a way of attracting funding for providing ESD. To overcome the fragmented education system, partnerships between local development agencies, the LSC and HEFCE are needed, and he referred to the statement by Ivan Lewis, Minister for Young People and Adult Skills: "What's happened for a period of time is that we've started to talk about education in segregation: early years, post-16, adult learning and so on. What we've stopped talking about is the big picture of a learning society. Now we're beginning to get this agenda back on centre stage". The skills that 21st century learners need to acquire are those of action research, self-management and study, resilience, adaptability, emotional and information literacy, as well as critical, analytical and evaluative skills. In developing the regional skills architecture, the aim is to move from dependence, through independence to interdependence, where regional communities work together to maximise mutual environmental, economic and social wellbeing.

Tracy Bhamra (Department of Design and Technology) Loughborough University) described the embedding of ESD into the curricula for c.360 undergraduates in the Department of Design and Technology at Loughborough University. Issues of SD are now taught across all years in core modules and in optional modules. Most students become engaged with the agenda – especially if marks are

attached to it – and many become very enthusiastic, realising that it brings more work opportunities. At level 3, individual support is available for students who choose to include SD issues in their dissertations. It appears that the concept of ‘creating sustainability’ is aspirational, uncertain and complex; on the other hand, reducing unsustainability is measurable, can be managed, and can be incrementally reduced. The four main concepts of sustainable design included are of: efficiency (resources and energy), systems (life cycle and ecology), people (ethics and consumption) and scale & appropriateness. The design briefs set students range from a more resource-efficient transport system to a Manifesto for Responsible Design, and are very different from those that students are used to, which are normally focussed on products.

Karl Walkinshaw (New Deal for Communities, Derwent) outlined the innovative New Deal for Communities project in Derwent - a 10-year £42 million grant + match scheme involving 4,000 households. Links have been made with all the major HE/FE establishments in Derby, as well as all 8 schools. The project has held a Love to Learn event attended by 500 local people, mini-conferences and workshops, created a network of trained Learner Advisors, and developed 20 case studies for use in curricula. Partnerships with Derby University and College provide information, support and consultancy for projects, such as a Timebank and Refugee Action, and training for ‘gangs of young people’, according to the needs and opportunities identified at the beginning of the regeneration project. They provide skills for the eco-features which are in all their capital projects covering energy use (e.g. super insulation, intelligent lighting controls, solar collectors), biodiversity, and materials (e.g. reclamation). The results can be seen in the Derwentio Heritage Village (a tourist and educational centre), the REVIVE Healthy Living Centre (housing health, adult and children services, a community library, café, and arts and community projects, and Derwent Stepping Stones (a nursery, training and community building). Since the inception of the project, the burglary rate in Derwent has decreased by 63%, 395 fewer households are on low income, whilst 63% think New Deal for Communities has improved the area. The project has demonstrated how academic theory must be translated into practice on the ground, and how SD relies on relationship with communities; the HE sector has a key role in developing behaviours, skills, knowledge and understanding in communities.

Adam Cade (Director, Studentforce for Sustainability (SfS), representing the student perspective) pointed to the increasingly loud student voice wanting to work for an ethically and environmentally sound organisation. He cited a survey showing that one half of students would likely not apply for a job if they learned a company was operating in a socially-irresponsible manner, and another that showed 37% of students would take a cut in income to work for more benign companies. Growth in campus fair trade campaigns, and the People and Planet student organisation shows the student interest, and CSR is becoming a ‘vital recruitment weapon in the battle for top-quality employees’, according to *Business in the Community* (2004). The challenge is to enable HEI staff to explore ways of responding to this growing demand and need. A vast range of work placement and volunteering opportunities exists for students to gain experience in sustainability-related areas, and these are increasingly valued by employers. Volunteering schemes run by Studentforce for Sustainability include CommunityCheck, which trains youth volunteers promote to learn about and promote resource efficiency and sustainable consumption in publicly accessible buildings and community spaces. The Environment Agency SD Policy Manager has listed the competencies (27 November PP4SD meeting, London) for graduates in the next 50 years as including: thinking creatively and holistically; considering long-term and global implications; and working in a multidisciplinary team involving all stakeholders. Studentforce for Sustainability is an exemplary organisation that is working towards this aim, focusing on young people, employability, sustainability and learning through placements, volunteering and career advice.

Paul Jackson (Director of Student Support and Development, University of Leicester) concluded the morning session with a review of how generic ‘graduateness’ related to SD, and the need to reinterpret it in academic language – he outlined 5 ‘C’s that relate to ESD: campuses, communities, curricula, competencies and careers. He underlined how students are more likely to change career due to a lack of values ‘match’ between them and their employers, than for purely monetary or skills reasons – e.g. British Nuclear Group state their mission as to be ‘Aggressive, Safe and Profitable’, whilst Oxfam’s is ‘Secure, skilled, equal, safe, healthy, heard’. It seems that the values debate is about where the skills agenda was 15 years ago: and in fact disciplines are about values also. For individuals, the skills and knowledge required for ‘sustainability literacy’ can seem daunting: ability to initiate and manage change, develop a high level of self-reflection, etc. etc., but can be seen more as a ‘lifelong learning’

agenda. Likewise, HEIs are challenged by the multiplicity of agendas: entrepreneurship, employability, graduateness, citizenship, internationalisation, globalisation, citizenship, etc. However, given the chance, innovative and creative links can and are being made in many projects throughout HEs in the region, and achieving their aims.

During the afternoon, Jos Hermans, of the Rhine Meuse RCE in the triangle of Eindhoven-Leuven-Cologne, spoke of the global learning space that is the philosophy of UNU (based in Tokyo). Citing the fact that only an estimated 5-10% of learning takes place in formal environments, he emphasised how learning is the result of continuous interaction between an individual or group and its physical and social environment. Learning for world citizens requires access to good quality education, though a broad range of physical and virtual learning environments, during a life-long process. The aim for the RCE is to reorient education towards SD, increase access to quality education, deliver trainers' training programmes and lead advocacy and awareness-raising. Their mission is to be a knowledge intermediary and a process innovator - helping people to find partners and funding. One example is the development of a common project and paper on *Learning for Sustainable Development in urbanized areas: a joint European experience*, which those interested and invited to provide input into.

The strategy of a good RCE is to be always in line with the politics in the region, in their case, in the triangle Eindhoven-Leuven-Cologne, they have partners in Germany and the Netherlands, with the Euregional priorities of being a 'technological top-region', a sustainable region and one with social cohesion.

Adam Cade (representing the East Midlands RCE working group) then outlined the local initiative, which is in an area with 10 HEIs, representatives of many of which were present. Citing Securing our Future (The UK Strategy for SD), that 'sustainability literacy will become a core competency for professional graduates', he set out the 'University Challenge'. This included universities being regional champions and local models of SD, with all education linking with regional agendas, all attitudes to be supportive of tackling climate change, and all graduates to be sustainability literate with improved 'skills for sustainable communities'. HEFCE have stated that their aim is to see the HE sector in England recognised 'as a major contributor to society's efforts to achieve sustainability'; a sixth 'C' to add to campuses, communities, curricula, competencies and careers is culture. Strategies for embedding SD included defining suitable metrics for funding, and creating links with all stakeholders in the educational system (within faculties, departments, other HEIs and other sectors, local communities, employers and professional bodies, and regional strategy-makers). In the East Midlands, the goals of sustainable communities stated in the Integrated Regional Strategy and the Employment Skills and Productivity Partnership Action Plan could be facilitated by HE involvement as well as by the RCE ESD partnership, a network of formal and informal educations mobilised to deliver ESD to a regional community. The EMESD group have keen to help other regions in the UK to apply for RCE status, as well as collaborating at European level to develop new partnerships and funding bids. One of these is the next Interreg C programme which is due to run from 2007-2013, which aims to create synergies between 'best practice projects' across Europe.

Points raised from the final summing up session, with the panel of James Luger, Adam Cade, Ed Brown and Tracy Varnava, and from the two networking sessions of the day are outlined below, paraphrased into a vision of how things could be in an HEI sector which had achieved the embedding of ESD (See also Annex 1).

Where would we like to be in 5 years' time?

- Make the benefits of ESD explicit (eg through funding, targets, carrot-stick) – in terms of recruitment and employability, league tables etc. – 'senior managers do not like to be left behind'. RCE status will help.
- Create effective communication networks between senior management, estates and academics.
- Enable student and academic researchers to work with estates.
- Actively search for / provide incentives for research funding for projects with communities.
- Work with the wider learning community – lifelong learning, students in schools, 'ambassadors.'
- Address sustainability concepts / literacy across all subjects in all regions of HE/FE.
- Train senior managers cf Leadership Foundation, so the importance of SD is recognised and staff work actively on curriculum development.
- Develop new measures and ways of costings, eg a 'non-sustainable development risk factor.'
- Provide evidence that EMS can save money.

- Capitalise on technology / distance learning / resource efficiency, cf EcoCampus has reached 463 SMEs in the region.
- Hold informal ‘competitions’ and ‘rankings’. eg in levels of car-sharing between regional HEIs.

Notes:

- Is the term *Regional Centre of Excellence* useful; in fact, the aim is to more be a network or partnership in a region with lots of players who are champions for ESD.
- Given the critically important and urgent nature of the situation, don’t we need something more radical.

Challenges:

- Overcome philosophy of competition between HEIs
- Address conflicting values

Ideas/comments for future regional events:

- Holding event in a community based venue, community catering, fair trade / organic, non-corporate
- Invitations aimed at Senior Management and then filtered through.
- Roadshow to visit FE/HEIs in the region
- Share examples of practice (will be facilitated by website)

Annex 1. Flipcharts – hopes and comments

A1. Adoption of meaningful and visible CSR strategies central to all regional HE institutions’ governance (Mission statements, specific objectives, projects, action plans).

A1a) Would we accept this as mandatory on us? Is there a need to make it mandatory – and if so, how? Maybe a condition of funding?

A1b) And we actively carry out the policies. These must not be ‘box ticking exercises for the senior exec.

A2. Clearer definition of the role of regional HE institutions in the meeting of regional/agreed ESD targets (appreciation of the breadth of meaning of ESD and CSR).

A2a) How are the targets to be measured and monitored? (Rosemary Horry)

A3. Make benefits of ESD explicit for individuals/groups/organisations.

A3a) Who would take responsibility for this? (Rosemary Horry)

B1. Developing / driving a collective SD ethos for EM HEIs.

B1a) How do we overcome philosophy of competition between institutions? Ed Brown

B2 To create more links between HEIs and the wider learning community

B2a) we could ask university students to help give classes in schools . This already happens through the EPSRC scheme.

B2b) How do we find novel ways of funding this? Eg. Specific projects and programmes. Ed Brown.

B2c) Could we find research opportunities that would need community participation?

C1. Incentives for outreach between HE and communities

C1a. Can we integrate this with Widening Participation? (Tony Parry). .. How?

C2. Addressing conflicting values

C3 Reconciling Rhetoric and practice.

C3a) Perhaps a stick and carrot (sic) approach. Make it easier for people and more in their interest to put policy into practice.

D1. For there to be real student and employer demand for sustainability concepts / literacy to be addressed across all subjects in the regions HE/FE.

D1a) The demand will increase if we introduce students to SD before they reach HE/FE. It should be addressed in school.

D2. For all HE/FE in the region to understand D1, and be able to demonstrate how they are addressing that demand, both within their curricula and their estates operations.

D2a) What we set as student projects!

E1. Key policy makers / senior managers in HEIs need to work in partnership with Estates – not just pay lipservice to SD.

E1a) It may be beneficial for us in estates to actually also talk to academics and try and work together towards a common goal . R.Horry@derby.ac.uk

E1b) They/we should also lead by example in implementing estates policies, eg transport.

E2. Teaching staff need to recognise importance of SD and engage actively in curriculum development.

E2a) We need to articulate the benefits (academic benefits too)

E2b) This represents a major shift in thinking for most teaching staff. Getting values and attitudes into the discussion is fundamentally important.

E in full:

1. International network – to implement development solutions
2. Teachers of environmental design
3. Key policy-makers/senior managers need to work in partnership with estates and truly commit to SD (not lipservice)
4. Campus managers use/talk with other researchers/students – X drivers already.
5. RCE –RM – reached senior managers,
6. Need to get importance of SD over to / network/communicate with teaching staff.
7. Balance of costs with ethics / values
8. Research into measure values
9. (find new way of costing)
10. Include ‘non-sustainable development risk factor’.
11. Need for systems thinking in how and who we relate to.

Wendy Miller, GEES Subject Centre
12 December 2006.