

**Title - Placing sustainability at the heart of the curriculum**

**Keywords** - Sustainable Development, Curriculum Development

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**Institution** - University of the West of England, Bristol

**Group** - MA/PG Dip Tourism Management/and Sustainability

**Activity** - Curriculum development to embed sustainability issues across a taught postgraduate programme

**Aim** - To articulate recent changes in postgraduate (taught) provision in tourism at Bristol-UWE, implemented with a view to better integrating sustainability into the postgraduate curriculum.

**Context / Background** - The synthesis of tourism business and resource management expertise within Bristol-UWE, as part of a University-wide strategy for building capacity in the subject area through inter-faculty collaboration.

### **Example**

Bristol-UWE's involvement in education for sustainable tourism development commenced in 1999 with the validation of an MA/PG Dip in Tourism and Sustainability, a programme of inter-disciplinary study that addresses tourism's potential to achieve a range of policy objectives (including local economic development in urban and rural areas, wildlife conservation and conservation of the built and cultural heritage) within the context of strategies for sustainable development. Since that time it has consistently attracted a small but highly motivated cohort of students, many of whom first engaged with tourism in studying for discipline-based degrees (chiefly geography, economics and sociology). Recently, relevant colleagues in the Faculty of the Built Environment and the Bristol Business School entered into collaboration with a view to developing a suite of undergraduate and postgraduate (taught) programmes that integrate business and management education with the study of tourism from a social science perspective. The result was the validation of a BA(Hons) and MA/PG Dip in Tourism Management (as two separate programmes), which are to be launched in September 2005. This case study briefly describes the organisation and ethos of the latter (though with references to its sister programme, the aforementioned MA/PG Dip in Tourism and Sustainability, where appropriate).

The aims of the programme embody that which is distinctive about tourism at Bristol-UWE, whilst being recognisable to colleagues in the subject area, and are as follows:

1. To provide students from a variety of academic and professional backgrounds with a sound understanding of major conceptual and applied research at the forefront of tourism studies and business management, and the means to reflect critically on this.
2. To develop current and potential managers of tourism as 'informed practitioners', with the capacity for independent thought and self-evaluation.
3. To facilitate the development of analytical research and creative problem-solving skills that may be applied in a variety of tourism-related contexts, with a view to informing theory and practice.
4. To encourage the development of transferable skills.
5. To foster a commitment to self-directed learning and continuing professional development, through the setting of personal goals and the identification of learning needs.

An innovative feature of the programme is the sharing of modules with the now-revised MA/PG Dip in Tourism and Sustainability (salient topics are listed in parentheses), namely:

- Tourism Concepts and Issues (tourism and globalisation, transnational corporations and micro-firms in tourism, tourist motivations and behaviour, the positive and negative impacts of tourism, tourism's role in development, health and safety issues in tourism);
- Leisure, Tourism and Cultural Policy (social inclusion, rural development, urban regeneration, ethical consumption and fair trade); and
- Sustainable Tourism: Principles and Practice (discourses and critiques of sustainability, sustainable tourism principles in practice: nature and sport tourism, coastal and marine tourism, and cultural and heritage tourism).

These three 15 credit modules comprise the intellectual space in which much of the work will be done in facilitating students' development as 'informed practitioners' of tourism (see above).

Accordingly, the first module addresses sustainable and unsustainable practice on the part of various stakeholders within the tourism system (including principals, intermediaries and tourists themselves), the second the means by which these practices are encouraged or constrained by governments and quasi-or non-governmental organisations within and between destination and source countries, and the third the context for understanding and critiquing these interventions (or non-interventions, as the case may be). In addition, the decision to make these modules compulsory for both programmes should yield a critical mass of participants for classroom-based discussion (with attendant economies of scale), and a real sense of 'community' amongst postgraduate students of tourism management/and sustainability (who, after all, share an interest in the 'world's biggest industry', though for arguably different reasons).

Alongside this common core, students on the MA/PG Dip in Tourism Management pursue four generic business and management modules (Marketing and Customer Behaviour, Organisational Analysis and Change, Finance for Managers and Strategic Management), whilst those on the MA/PG Dip in Tourism and Sustainability undertake three bespoke modules that each address an aspect of the so-called 'triple-bottom-line' of sustainable development/tourism (Environmental Tourism Management, Visitor Management and Interpretation and Tourism in Local Economic Development), together with a field-based module (Tourism Destination Marketing Applications); all of which are 15 credits in size. Regardless of which programme they are registered on, students also complete a research module (also 15 credits) and, for the full masters, a 60 credit dissertation (making 180 credits in all).

**Results / Feedback** - It is too early to ascertain whether or not embedding sustainability within the core modules that are shared by UWE-Bristol's two taught postgraduate programmes in tourism (and any others that may be validated in the future) will make a meaningful difference to students' career prospects and, ultimately, the business practices adopted by the organisations that employ them (although initial consultation with industry partners and alumni suggests that it might). However, only by getting today's and tomorrow's tourism managers to engage with sustainable development and related concepts (including their limitations) can we reasonably expect to reconcile the often conflicting – but potentially complementary – agendas of industry and academia, in making tourism both 'bigger' and 'better'.