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Building sustainability into student employability education.

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Building Sustainability into student employability education

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Abstract

There is increasing drive to incorporate sustainability into higher education and interest in the role educators can play in promoting sustainable development. Studies to date have largely focussed on institution level activity, with recent interest in how this can be incorporated into teaching. The purpose of this workshop is to focus on work-related learning activity and explore how sustainability competencies can be implemented in this area. We explore the thoughts of employability stakeholders such as university managers; academic staff; employers and placement students to shape our approach in developing our curriculum to incorporate sustainability. Workshop participants will be encouraged to consider the benefits of incorporating sustainability with employability, and how sustainability may be applied to their own specific context and environment. This workshop explores pedagogical approaches around the creation of responsible citizens for local action and global impact and looks to understand how placement students could be empowered to drive the sustainability agenda in their host organisations. We suggest that students on work placements could act as catalysts for sustainability and are keen to explore best practice at the intersection of sustainability and employability education with fellow employability practitioners.

Keywords

Sustainability Goals, Employability, Higher Education

Presentation

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY ABERDEEN

Practitioner Workshop: Building sustainability into student employability education

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Session Aim

- To explore how sustainability competencies can be developed through the employability curriculum
- To share best practice and explore ideas to co-create a future-proofed employability curriculum



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Learning from the literature



- Education is the driving force of establishing sustainability since it is one of the main communication vehicles and the basis for the "sustainability mindset" (Zaléniene and Pereira, 2021).
- Increasing drive to incorporate sustainability into HE, particularly Management education. Integration or insertion? (Figueiro and Raufflet 2015).
- Identification of Sustainable Development Competencies (QAA, 2021).
- Interest in the role pedagogy can play in developing these competencies (Brundiers et al., 2021).

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RGU's Sustainability Journey



- Context: our history and economic environment
- Business Graduates Association accreditation/PRME
- Institutional focus on sustainability in the curriculum as part of RGU+
- Course statements and mapping across all UG courses


UNESCO's Key Competencies for Sustainability

Competency	A student who displays this competency can:	
Systems thinking competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and understand relationships Analyze complex systems Consider how systems are embedded within different domains and scales Deal with uncertainty 	Ways of thinking
Anticipatory competency (Future thinking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and evaluate multiple outcomes Draw their own vision of the future Apply the precautionary principle Assess the consequences of actions Deal with risks and changes 	
Critical thinking competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question norms, practices and opinions Reflect on their own values, perceptions and actions Take a position in the sustainable development discourse 	Ways of Practicing
Strategic competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement innovative actions that further sustainable development at the local level and further afield 	
Collaboration competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn from others (including peers, and others inside and outside of their institution) Understand and respect the needs, perspectives and actions of others Deal with conflicts in a group Facilitate collaborative and participatory problem solving 	
Integrated problem-solving competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply different problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainable development problems Develop viable, inclusive and equitable solutions Utilize appropriate competencies to solve problems 	Ways of being
Self-awareness competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on their own values, perceptions and actions Reflect on their own role in the local community and global society Continually evaluate and further enhance their actions Deal with feelings and desires 	
Normative competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and reflect on the norms and values that underlie our actions Negotiate sustainable development values, principles, goals and targets, in the context of conflicts of interests and trade-offs, common knowledge and contradictions 	

Source: OMA, 2021

The project

- Stakeholders
 - Students
 - Employers
 - HE Institution (Internal)
- Mix of interviews and questionnaire responses (using JISC Online Surveys)
- Key themes identified from each set of stakeholders.



Data Themes

Student Themes

- Understanding of sustainability was narrowly focused
- Strong awareness through University learning
- Meaningful contribution to sustainability discussion but limited action
- Currently learning more within University than in the workplace

Employer Themes

- No consistent focus on the three pillars of sustainability environmental and economic
- Aware of importance from a reputational point of view
- Looking for graduates to 'take a position' in the sustainability discourse

HE Institution Themes

- Graduates have a role in leading sustainability activity beyond the University
- Nurturing values more important than creating new content
- Meaningful contribution to sustainability discussion but limited action
- Missing link between values and actions

Example data:

Student

"In my personal experience, I very much enjoy learning about sustainability and would be happy for more modules to discuss this subject... As I worked in an SME who had limited resources and time, finding small inexpensive ways to promote sustainability could be beneficial to them"

Employer

"there have been other priorities over the last few years and its definitely something on my agenda this year"

"I would not say I am informed or engaged... I haven't attended any events or haven't had any business discussions about it with anybody"

HE Institution

"...so I think it's about it's as much about developing the individual as it is preparing them for a particular sort of career pathway"

"...my ambition for it [sustainability] is that it will be the lens by which every student will view their future employment, view their lives, and have impact locally, nationally, globally and as part of that citizen to global citizen journey"

Rethinking our approach

- UNESCO competencies align well with our curriculum
- Scaffolding needed to connect curriculum and UNESCO competencies
- Employability educators as brokers
- Students/graduates as a conduit between HE institutions and employing organisations
- Nurture values to underpin proactive and independent action


Mapping UNESCO's Key Competencies for Sustainability

Competency	A student who displays this competency can:		
Systems thinking competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and understand relationships Analyze complex systems Consider how systems are embedded within different domains and scales Deal with uncertainty 	Ways of thinking	Undergraduates stage 1 and 2
Anticipatory competency (Future thinking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and evaluate multiple outcomes Draw their own vision of the future Apply the precautionary principle Assess the consequences of actions Deal with risks and changes 		
Critical thinking competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question norms, practices and opinions Reflect on their own values, perceptions and actions Take a position in the sustainable development discourse 	Ways of Practicing	Student placement year
Strategic competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement innovative actions that further sustainable development at the local level and further afield 		
Collaboration competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn from others (including peers, and others inside and outside of their institution) Understand and respect the needs, perspectives and actions of others Deal with conflicts in a group Facilitate collaborative and participatory problem solving 		
Integrated problem-solving competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply different problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainable development problems Develop viable, inclusive and equitable solutions Utilize appropriate competencies to solve problems 	Ways of being	Final year and Post-graduation
Self-awareness competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on their own values, perceptions and actions Reflect on their own role in the local community and global society Continually evaluate and further enhance their actions Deal with feelings and desires 		
Normative competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and reflect on the norms and values that underlie our actions Negotiate sustainable development values, principles, goals and targets, in the context of conflicts of interests and trade-offs, common knowledge and contradictions 		

Adapted from OMA, 2021

Today's task

- Small groups each working on a poster with 5 minutes focused on each question
- Capture e-mail addresses
- Share on Padlet – we will circulate round the group



What teaching and assessment approaches have you tried could underpin the development of sustainability competencies?

What approaches have you tried to embed sustainability in your work related learning activity?

How do we demonstrate the impact of the socially responsible citizens we are aiming to develop?

What are the challenges of incorporating sustainability into employability modules or learning objectives?

Group email addresses:

Ways of practicing



Ways of thinking

Ways of being

Share to Padlet using QR code below:



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