

Sustainability in Practice certificate (SiP): A co-curricular, multi-disciplinary online short course

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Teaching, learning and assessment



Institutional Context

Nottingham Trent University (NTU) is the 9th largest university in the UK (out of 169) with 33,255 students split over five different campuses and comprised of ten academic schools. NTU gained university status in 1992, although its roots go back to 1843 when its sole academic focus was Design.

Audience

All students

Intended outcomes of the project

The Sustainability in Practice (SiP) course was designed as an opportunity for all students and staff to:

- + enhance their sustainability literacy,
- + gain an understanding of how sustainability relates to their academic discipline
- + contribute to addressing local and global sustainability challenges through personalised project work.

Outline of activity/project

SiP is offered to all NTU students and staff. With a supradisciplinary 'MOOC' feel it is housed within our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and is usually completed as an extra-curricular activity, although it is increasingly being integrated into existing courses. Learners study at their own pace. Throughout four themed sessions – learners choose between food, energy or clothing – learners grapple with some of the most challenging contemporary issues as framed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (eg poverty, climate change and gender equality). With the certainty that solutions will not arrive in discrete disciplinary packages, learners are taken on an exploration of personal, disciplinary, and multi-disciplinary perspectives before they propose solutions through a final assessment.

Activities are designed to foster competencies such as systems thinking, problem-solving and collaboration and they include Prezis, quizzes, online research, discussion forums and collaborative mapping of sustainability solutions. SiP also hosts a suite of sustainability resources from various disciplines to help learners connect sustainability to their wider studies.

SiP is added to the Higher Education Achievement Records of undergraduate participants.

Further guidance for project leads

The SiP course is supported via the institutional VLE. This makes the course accessible to all students and allows for monitoring of participation across subject areas and student demographics. This high visibility of the course encourages students to view sustainability as a priority of the institution and fundamental to 'what we do here'.

SiP projects are currently marked at NTU by a group of academics from across the institution who generously donate their personal time to mark the submissions from their subject areas. This is testament to the high value colleagues place on SiP, however as the course has become more popular more sustainable ways of managing marking have been trialled, including:

- 1 Move to group assessments to reduce the actual number of submissions and promote collaborative working
- 2 Create an event out of the submissions where students present their work in person and are given immediate peer and tutor feedback

Guidance for participants

Participating in the SiP certificate will require a minimum of 6 hours; 30-60 minutes for each of the asynchronous online sessions and over four hours for the final project.

The project should demonstrate your understanding of sustainability, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and how they can be contextualised within your own academic discipline.

Use creative, interesting, or innovative, ways to showcase your project to a non-specialist audience. Previous projects have included posters, videos, mood boards, business proposals, poetry, podcasts and a fashion shoot.

Assessment or Evaluation

Feedback from SiP participants reflects the transformative ‘change agent’ quality of SiP and highlights that students value engaging in multi-disciplinary collaborative learning. We have periodically evaluated SiP through focus groups and these have proved fruitful for deepening our understanding of how students experience the course and potential enhancements; one set of focus groups prompted our introduction of a highly successful series of offline SiP Challenge Days at the students’ request to combine academic competencies with practical sustainability skills.

Useful resources

An earlier version of SiP is discussed within the following presentation:

Puntha, H and Kennedy, E (2015) Using video to capture student learning: Running video assessments. Media-Enhanced Learning Special Interest Group (MELSIG), Nottingham University. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YOVzc-vAAg

Examples of SiP final projects can be found here:

Arts and Humanities student: soundcloud.com/missjsteel/sip-podcast/soundcloud.com/missjsteel/project-podcast-episode-2

Art and Design student: www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=i4q2jTWCYjw%5D

Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences students: www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7LWLqUkPW0

Social Sciences student: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObwRV-e44bc&t=9s