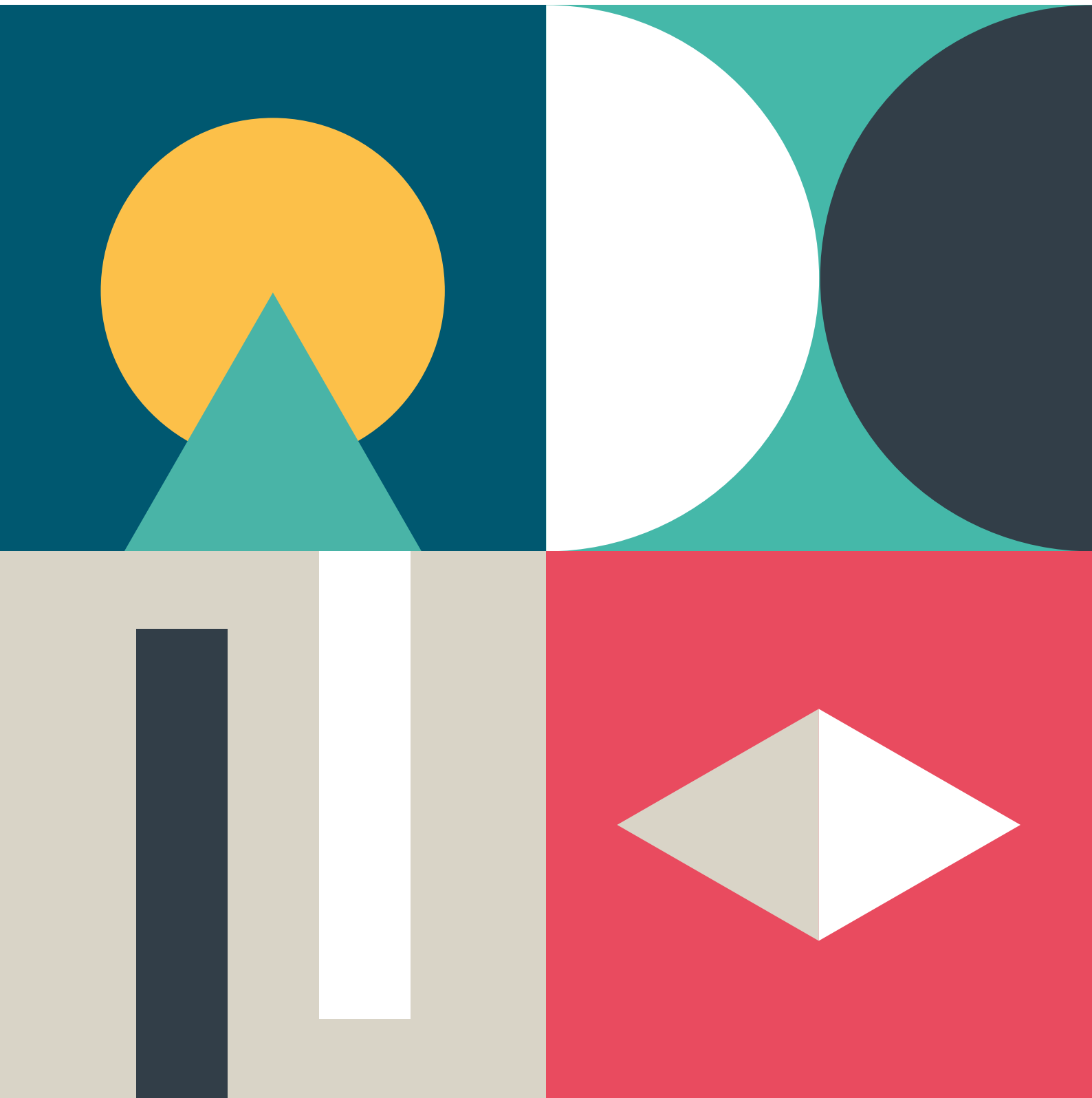


Voices of Sustainability

Blog collection



Contents

Fiona Goodwin	3	Vanique Kruger	5	Mayen Cunden	6	Manveer Gill	8
Director of Operations, EAUC		Sustainability Officer, UWE		Lecturer, De Montfort		Project Officer, CDP	
Nazira Karodia	10	Bitsy Pout	12	Joy Carter	14	Jason Leman	16
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Wolverhampton		Student, Southampton		Vice-Chancellor, Winchester		Surveys Officer, Advance HE	
Leah Bromley	18	Jim Nottingham	20	Eleanor Cooke	22	Kate Mori	24
Student Sustainability Engagement, UWE		Chief Information Officer, UAL		Student, Manchester Metropolitan		Quality and Standards Specialist, QAA	

Introduction

Sustainability for Everyone: Here and Now

The ‘Voices of Sustainability Blog Collection’ forms a cornerstone of our Connect Member Benefit offering for March 2021 and is intended to address the theme title ‘Sustainability for Everyone: Here and Now’. By definition, sustainability is an issue – and a threat – relevant to the entire human population. It provides an example of a unifying area in which we all, no matter what our background, have a common cause. Every one of us has the same urgent need to understand and address this single complex issue. As a consequence, sustainability is an area that needs to be open to all, and the responsibility of everyone. Suggestions have been made that certain facets of sustainability better represent views and concerns from richer, more developed countries, with less voice given to societies with more urgent survival needs. Nevertheless, more recent sustainability and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) publications, including that, for example, by UNESCO, present a more holistic view, placing greater emphasis on issues such as gender, ethnicity and social inequalities.

In this collection of short blogs, we try to cast some light on how sustainability is open to all. The underlying focus provides an opportunity to generate ideas in relation to sustainability as something for everyone. The blog collection elicits the experiences and ideas of a range of individuals and communities and is intended to provide some deliberately diverse perspectives. Whilst it may not offer definitive answers, we hope that it demonstrates that the sustainability agenda needs to draw on all voices, and that future research, teaching and policy should account for this.

We would like to offer our thanks to each of the 12 contributors to this collection – both for your blogs and for your photographs.

Patrick Baughan, Senior Advisor, Advance HE.



“Sustainability should be at the heart of every decision. Institutions need to take climate action and we are proud of the Global Climate Letter for Universities and Colleges where institutions can show their commitment to becoming net-zero well before 2050.”

Fiona Goodwin

Director of Operations and Planning for EAUC – the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

The picture is a pair of hyacinth macaws that I took back in 2004 when I was in the Pantanal in Brazil whilst travelling in South America. Hyacinth macaws are classified as vulnerable and their biggest threats are habitat loss (they rely on the manduvi tree) and capture for the pet trade due to their calm natures. They mate for life. When I took this picture there were about 30 macaws on one tree. It was the only tree left in a cleared part of the forest. For me this illustrates the sheer destruction humans cause around the world, damaging our forests and killing our animals. Sustainability to me means living within our means and treating nature with respect. Humans rely on all of the other animals we live together with. From the ants to the spiders to the macaws. Macaws distribute seeds, these provides new saplings for the forest and homes to so many more species. We are damaging our world and people need to realise how much we rely on it for our very own survival.

Why is sustainability important to you?

I have been lucky enough to travel to many countries to see wildlife and so many times it is through the impact of humans that you see the most destructive effects. A baby orangutan that has accidentally left the reserve and was quite used to be clutching to the driver of the moped which took him back to the reserve is always a memory I have. The impact of palm oil in Borneo, as well as many other Southeast Asian countries, is truly breathtaking in the worse sense. But there are always nuggets of hope and meeting passionate people who are really making a difference – both in their local communities and the wider world. Mr Ambrose was such a person. He worked on a palm oil plantation. The company

that was clearing the area for more planting realised the proboscis monkeys were becoming more of a problem. So they decided to keep a corner of the forest for the monkeys. Mr Ambrose was put in charge of looking after this small but essential reserve after becoming more interested in their behaviour. It turns out proboscis monkeys are a fan of pancakes which they got a taste for when stealing the palm oil workers lunch boxes. Mr Ambrose is now considered by WWF to be the best expert on proboscis monkeys. Whilst there is much to despair in the world and so many stories of destruction and more and more animals becoming endangered, I always remember Mr Ambrose's smile whilst feeding pancakes to those proboscis monkeys.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

Sustainability needs to cover all areas of curriculum – from primary to higher education. Children need to understand our reliance on the earth and the animals we share our home with. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are an excellent framework to ensure a just transition and that no one is left behind. EAUC pioneer those institutions that are taking innovative steps through the SDG Accord. The young people of today will be the very ones that will have to face the problems of a changing climate and they need to have the tools and skills to do this. This isn't a problem that is going to go away. Climate change is happening now.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can 'do better' in making progress with sustainability?

It is important that universities and colleges take their role in society and their communities seriously. Sustainability should be at the heart of every decision. Institutions need to take climate action and we are proud of the Global Climate Letter for Universities and Colleges where institutions can show their commitment to becoming net-zero well before 2050. Students need to keep their institutions held to account and want to see the progress towards these targets – no more greenwashing. Students can also take action through their own actions but also working with their university or college, co-creation of strategies and solutions is the only way to ensure the best possible result. By bringing together the skills, experience and passion of students and staff, now that can be the real game changer. 2021 is the year to take action as we are hosting COP26 – the spotlight is going to be shining on the UK, on education and on our young people.



“I was so proud to see an institution actively engaging with sustainability. Not only by having reusable bottles for cleaning solutions, but also mapping the Sustainable Development Goals on these bottles.”

Vanique Kruger

Sustainability Officer and second year BA (Hons) Education student, University of the West of England (UWE).

The topic of sustainability in higher education is so well placed, it has the opportunity to change current circumstances, but also help shape those of us who will be the decision makers of the future. It comprises people from various different walks of life, with completely different backgrounds and more often than not the courage to speak out on subjects they feel strongly about. In a higher education setting, we as students have the opportunity to lend our voices to causes we feel strongly about. At the same time we have the support of distinguished academics and the higher education institution to add substance to our plight.

When it comes to informing students, a lot is left to the imagination. It is imperative to remember that we as students want to know what is going on in our institution, but more importantly to cater communications to student listeners. Especially with subjects such as sustainability which affects each and every one of us, messages should be short and sweet. Make it easy for everyone to understand, because when we as students understand what is going on, we want to know more and get more involved.

My biggest concern is that we are all working towards a bigger goal. We aim to have something by 2030 for instance. However, why can we not have smaller goals? Why not aim for smaller more frequent achievements in the process of working towards your main goal?

My choice of photo:

I was so proud to see an institution actively engaging with sustainability. Not only by having reusable bottles for cleaning solutions, but also mapping the Sustainable Development Goals on these bottles. Small actions like these raise awareness of the importance of SDGs.



“Teaching should hold up a sustainability-mirror to students so that they develop self-understanding and sustainability identities that inform how they then apply the knowledge they acquire, responsibly.”

Mayen Cunden

Lecturer in Information Systems in the Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility at De Montfort University, Leicester.

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

Sustainability is about locating my identity in the decisions I make and the actions I take that impact the planet and its future custodians. Locating my sustainability-identity therefore is to understand how I, through all aspects of my behaviour, contribute to stemming the declining habitability of the earth for all its residents. My photo encapsulates this idea of earth in mind, in all that I do, inspired by David Orr in his book of the same title. The fingerprint across the profile of my head set against the background of the earth is meant to convey the effects of human action that have the potential to diminish the vitality of the lived experiences of our offspring and indeed future generations. Our fingerprint is forever that spot on the earth which conjures up the sentiment expressed by Lady Macbeth (Act V, Scene I): “What need we fear, who knows it, when none can call our power to account”. Our children do call our power over the earth, to account.

Why is sustainability important to you?

My students generally view sustainability as ‘out there’ but none see it as personally affecting or how their actions affect sustainability, so hopefully in describing what sustainability means to me I may in some way contribute to learning and indeed learn from the perspectives of others as well. Education has enabled us to shape our environment into satisfying our infinite wants which in turn has created complex global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss and ocean health, all areas in which the planet is imperilled and where we are running out of time to address these problems. As an

educator, I believe that I have a moral responsibility to ensure that through my teaching, I am able to equip students and ultimately graduates with the skills necessary to meet these 21st Century challenges not just as it concerns their world of work but throughout their lifespan and indeed for the work of the world.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

I am firmly of the opinion that sustainability education may be operationalised through the teaching of any curriculum and to every student, if the objective of teaching is not to make students masters of curriculum content but masters of their persons. Teaching should hold up a sustainability-mirror to students so that they develop self-understanding and sustainability identities that inform how they then apply the knowledge they acquire, responsibly.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can ‘do better’ in making progress with sustainability?

Sustainability must be the concern of everyone and we can certainly do better in increasing the attention we pay to sustainability education in HE curricula as well as integrating sustainability-citizenship into the futures of our graduates. Students ‘get it’ and appreciate the value of sustainability measures, and expect their universities to take sustainability seriously. But this to me implies not just embedding sustainability in the curricula, but to develop the concept further through operationalising it in curricula ranging from architecture to zoology. For example, we could look at designing assessment with a sustainability focus that connects the curriculum content in terms of its relationships to the natural world, in the sense of how that content derives from or impacts the natural world. It is about making sustainability a desirable graduate attribute through a ‘work-of-the-world-integrated’ learning approach. Adopting this approach, I believe, does not mean adding content to overburdened teaching workloads but about redesigning content to link with the natural world. By connecting students with the natural world, through teaching practices that treat as equally important the purpose of study, as the content of that study, students may understand how the application of the knowledge they gain, in whatever discipline they study, impacts the natural world.



“A sustainable future requires an appreciation of the different, interconnected facets of sustainability – social, environmental and economic – to be acted on by the institutions around us.”

Manveer Gill

Project Officer, CDP (Graduate, BSc Mathematics)

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

I have chosen the city of Matera in Southern Italy as my picture depicting sustainability. Within the city complex of cave dwellings, as late as 1950, disease and poverty were rampant, and entire families lived in single roomed caves without running water or electricity, and with their livestock. These conditions led to the Italian government relocating the entire population in 1952, abandoning Matera and unintentionally isolating families in the process. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, this city is just one example of the need for everyone to have good standards of living – a value at the heart of social sustainability, as well as the difficulties faced by individuals striving for that.

Why is sustainability important to you?

If we do not strive for sustainability, we are saying that we are fine with the citizens of the future coming into a degraded world, a world where they have less control over the decisions they make. That does not sit right with me, and I am sure it doesn't for most people. A sustainable future requires an appreciation of the different, interconnected facets of sustainability – social, environmental and economic – to be acted on by the institutions around us. When some of those institutions and broader governing mechanisms are not doing what we need them to, then something needs to change.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

I think HE institutions need to look long and hard at their curricula, with a view to the future. That means no longer teaching courses that will be redundant in the future and ensuring that they sufficiently train their staff to be able to teach about sustainability. If we want inclusivity, then I would suggest co-collaboration of curricula with students, as well as actively seeking participation from minority stakeholders. Additionally, it is important that institutions are aware of the colonial nature of their curricula and sources of funding and seek advice to diversify and decolonise their work. None of these suggestions can take place overnight, nor is anyone asking that they should. A good first step is to publicly acknowledge that change is needed.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can 'do better' in making progress with sustainability?

In order for us to determine whether or not an institution is taking material steps towards sustainability and if they are acting in line with any pledges they have made, we need them to be transparent about their progress. Without transparency and disclosure, students cannot readily hold their institutions to account. Whether they are at the beginning of their sustainability journey or they are already established leaders, there is an opportunity to pioneer change, and to be vocal about it. For institutional leaders that want to know how they can advance the sustainability agenda and respond to the climate crisis, the Climate Commission's HE Climate Action Toolkit is a must read.



“The range of our desire for sustainable change and environmental improvement is vast; in universities this affects all aspects of the institution from the physical landscape to how learning occurs.”

Professor Nazira Karodia

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Regional Engagement, University of Wolverhampton

Sustainability and ecological concerns have become the buzz-ideas of our moment, traumatized as we are by a pandemic and environmental degradation of our Anthropocene era. Perhaps, we see sustainability as our saviour from the existential threat; a clarion call to action, to involvement, to be engaged as academics, workers, consumers, members of communities and parents of future generations. The range of our desire for sustainable change and environmental improvement is vast; in universities this affects all aspects of the institution from the physical landscape to how learning occurs. A trawl through relevant literature will throw up inspired lists, priorities, policies, recommendations and practices; most highly recommendable.

I want to reflect on some of the specifics which resonate with me. I am a chemist with a keen interest in Green Chemistry in both research and learning and teaching.

When I moved to the University of Wolverhampton in 2016, I was intrigued to discover that we had purchased a Grade II listed former brewery and had ambitious plans for a built-environment campus. We were to transform the 12 acres site contaminated by its industrial history. At its peak, the Springfield Brewery produced 1,500 barrels of beer a week and employed 900 people. Today, the site is home to an University Technical School (for year 7-13 students), an apprenticeships hub called Elite Centre for Manufacturing Skills and the University's School of Architecture and the Built Environment – to deliver research, skills, education and training for construction underpinned by sustainability and the principles of the circular economy. This regeneration project has been achieved in partnership with the community.

The next phase in the plan is a National Brownfield Institute where a team of specialist researchers, consultants and industry experts will advise on all aspects of brownfield development in the region and nationally. By 2030 they will have cleaned up former industrial sites in the Black Country and built the much needed new homes.

However, beyond these aspects, I want to focus on community. If people are excluded, marginalised or see themselves on the receiving side of racism and prejudice, they may wish to disengage from future planning, especially if the planning is done with established institutions. So, for me, beyond obvious interventions for sustainability, I feel we need to invest in community. The teaching and learning at our universities, the structures of institutions, our ethos, our attitudes, our policies, and our actions must stand an ongoing audit for inclusivity, diversity, tolerance and engaged work to redress inequality. The test for sustainability as a policy in a university is this task of engaging for change and in how we locate and sustain community.



“Higher education institutions are full of people with potential to create real change with their voices. If sustainability becomes part of everyone’s colloquial language, the necessary change to a greener lifestyle and economy will not seem so drastic a change.”

Bitsy Pout

Environmental Science student, University of Southampton

I am a second year Environmental Science student at the University of Southampton. I am also my year’s course representative, so I am very enthusiastic about opening up a dialogue between individuals within higher education institutions and the students they provide for.

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

The definition of sustainability has been engrained in my mind since my first geography teachers introduced me to the phenomenon; creating and consuming resources whilst ensuring the same resources are available for future generations. This is a promising start to defining sustainability; however, I personally feel that it means a lot more than just resource management. It is built on three core elements: environmental protection, economic development and social development and stability. The photo I’ve included has both natural and human elements, represented by trees in the background and boats in the foreground. Blue sky on the horizon illustrates a brighter future for sustainability – we just need to take the steps to get there.

Why is sustainability important to you?

Sustainability is important to me because I want to be able to have children and allow them grow up in a world where nature and protection of heritage and culture is at the forefront of society’s to-do list. It’s important simply because without it, the future looks bleak, and I genuinely believe that humans have the capacity for change – as demonstrated by the last year. The selfish part of me wants to travel the world, seeing as much of the beautiful Earth we live in as possible. I want to see pristine landscapes, untouched by humans and unharmed by climate change. Without sustainability being incorporated into our everyday lives, this will unfortunately remain a pipe dream.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

Higher education institutions have the perfect framework and capacity to implement sustainability into all degree programmes, as well as within the institutions themselves, including all staff and board members.

Sustainability can be applied to all aspects of life, therefore each degree programme will be able to open a dialogue about sustainability in mandatory formative sessions. Alternatively, and perhaps preferentially, each degree programme could implement a module, or part of a module, to specifically address sustainability within that field. For example, a psychology degree could have a module that looks at the psychology behind sustainability and stewardship – why do humans do this? What is the climate change crisis doing to the mental health of younger generations? Or, a maths degree – the maths of climate change (or any complex system) including tipping points. How long do we have, what do we need to do?

Sustainability is also easily applicable to arts degrees such as music or art – ‘Green Art’ is already on the rise.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can ‘do better’ in making progress with sustainability?

Hopefully, this will trickle down into all aspects of society; education being where many ideologies and habits start. Higher education institutions are full of people with potential to create real change with their voices. If sustainability becomes part of everyone’s colloquial language, the necessary change to a greener lifestyle and economy will not seem so drastic a change. So many people just aren’t aware of the climatic issues threatening us as a human race, so education is key in addressing this.

A change that higher education institutions should already be implementing across the UK is improving waste management practices. There should be no single-use plastic being used in universities – they have the money to pay slightly extra for reusable alternatives. There is no excuse for this in my opinion.



“Tackling the climate emergency requires a revolution in everything we do and that includes universities. The good news is that the generation of students coming into our campuses are ready for this kind of action.”

Professor Joy Carter

Vice-Chancellor of University of Winchester

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

At the University of Winchester, we say that to us, sustainability means living in harmony, acting with kindness, and caring for the planet and all living things, now and for future generations.

The photo illustrates the attitudes we need in a sustainable world.

Why is sustainability important to you?

I believe the greatest challenge facing the planet is the climate and ecological crisis. We are living through hugely challenging times; but if the coronavirus is like a storm battering the planet, there is every danger that the full impact of climate change will feel like a tsunami.

As the university for sustainability and social justice, Winchester is committed to contributing to a sustainable future and making a positive environmental impact.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

Sustainability and social responsibility is embedded across our teaching and other activities at Winchester, as demonstrated by achieving the National Union of Students' Responsible Futures accreditation. Through our Climate Change Education Strategy, we ensure our students graduate with an understanding of how climate change is relevant to their subject area and their everyday lives.

It spans the formal curriculum (teaching, learning and assessment), informal curriculum (on campus and community activities) and subliminal curriculum (organisational policies and practices – for example, [our free reusable coffee mugs](#) that all first year students receive). The United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals provide the agenda for action in all three areas.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can 'do better' in making progress with sustainability?

A [poll](#) of Generation Z undertaken for the University of Winchester found that 54% believe the climate crisis is the most important issue of the day and a majority said they believe the government is handling the crisis poorly.

Tackling the climate emergency requires a revolution in everything we do and that includes universities. The good news is that the generation of students coming into our campuses are ready for this kind of action.

As universities, we must urgently broaden our thinking about how we prepare and educate future generations for the worsening climate crisis. As leaders in education and research, universities are in a unique position to become catalysts for real and lasting change.

We must move away from small-scale mitigation efforts to reduce carbon emissions and think on a larger scale about how we can radically rethink teaching and research. We should take inspiration from the deep adaptation movement, which, inspired by the work of Professor Jem Bendell, is clear that society needs to urgently prepare itself for the worst possible outcomes of climate change. This is the kind of pragmatic, realistic leadership that we need to follow.



“Think about your future career or the work that people studying this discipline go on to do. Could (or should) that work carry on as it is now for the next ten years? A hundred years? A thousand years?”

Jason Leman

Surveys Officer at Advance HE and postgraduate researcher in politics

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

Sustainability means acting like there is a future for ourselves, other people and the planet. I imagined someone jotting down things on a calendar in June 3021, a thousand years from now, maybe excited to be going to a fair on a summer’s day.

Why is sustainability important to you?

Life on earth is very special and human beings are a very special form of life. Without sustainability we cause inequality, suffering and loss. Without sustainability we ultimately risk the future of humanity and the future of life on our planet.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

Think about your future career or the work that people studying this discipline go on to do. Could (or should) that work carry on as it is now for the next ten years? A hundred years? A thousand years? If not, then something needs to change. What would need to change about the work, the people or the world to make it sustainable?

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can ‘do better’ in making progress with sustainability?

Right now higher education seems focused on getting through. On the challenges of recruitment, research, pedagogy, impact and achievement. But we need to stop and look up at what is coming. To make others stop and look up. We need individuals and institutes and institutions to be leaders. To stop and look up first. To show what needs to change and how it can be done.



“We are collectively facing both a climate crisis and crises of inequality and injustice. The current system works for neither people nor the planet, and sustainable and regenerative principles pave a way to a better future.”

Leah Bromley

Student Sustainability Engagement Coordinator at The Student's Union, University of the West of England (UWE)

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

Living more in harmony with natural rhythms and patterns and also more in harmony with those around us (on a local, regional and global scale).

This photo was taken on my visit to BedZED, the UK's first large-scale eco-village, in south London. The houses here really encompass living in harmony with nature and each other as there's plenty of car-free community space for children to play, low carbon design features in the buildings and use of reclaimed materials to construct them.

Why is sustainability important to you?

We are collectively facing both a climate crisis and crises of inequality and injustice. The current system works for neither people nor the planet, and sustainable and regenerative principles pave a way to a better future. It is imperative we take action now, to prevent and mitigate further suffering among current and future generations.

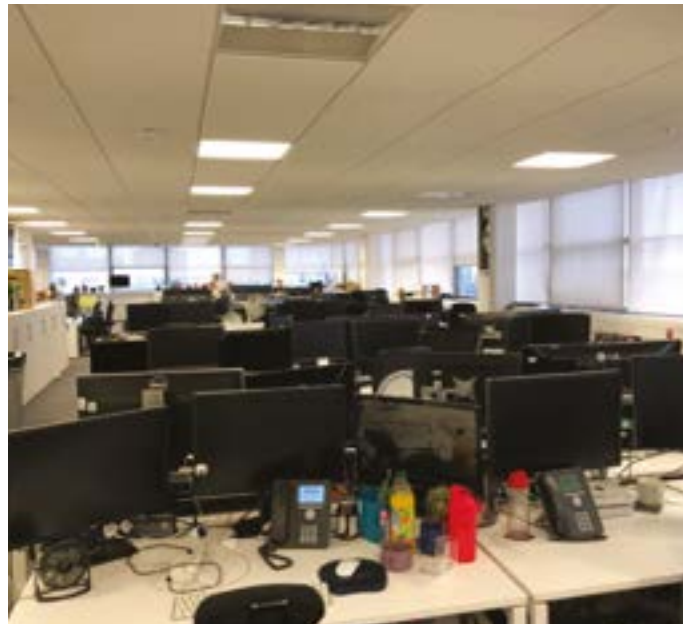
How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

Making education about sustainability relevant to students' programme of study. This can empower them to understand how sustainability principles are relevant to their chosen career and make them excited about sustainability in relation to a subject they're passionate about. It also ensures higher education is equipping students for future challenges in their place of work.

To make it inclusive, I think it's really important to meet people where they are with their understanding of sustainability and recognise that it can mean something different to everyone. Showcasing a diverse range of sustainability examples can help people see something that they might identify with. Also reinforcing that sustainability is about more than environmental issues and links with social justice, also helps to open up the discussion. This also demonstrates why sustainability is important and that it must be considered in relation to different liberation groups.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can 'do better' in making progress with sustainability?

Ensure that sustainability is taught through an intersectional lens and makes clear links between environmental degradation/climate change and social inequalities and injustices. Those who contribute least to the environmental issues, are often those who suffer the most. Making these links is really important because we can't address climate change without addressing these inequalities.



“There is a great deal to learn from the past year, how we choose to live and work in the future are entwined with technology which in turn (hopefully) will enable sustainable societal change.”

Jim Nottingham

Chief Information Officer at the University of the Arts London (UAL)

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

This is a photograph I took on 18 March 2020, the day when we were all instructed to work from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The image is of one part of the two floors we occupied at UAL as our ‘home base’. The two floors combined have an occupancy of 158 staff – as you can imagine, we left in rather a hurry. When I walked around the department on that last day taking photos of the deserted two floors, I had no conception that this situation would last for quite so long.

In some ways the moving of an entire learning community of over 60,000 users to online was a relatively straight forward thing to do but on reflection, one of the reasons it went so smoothly was our technology strategy which planned for and invested in sustainable technology.

The most significant part of this strategy was the move to a highly sustainable shared data centre. We also spent time embedding sustainability within our procurement strategies and investing in technologies that would significantly reduce energy and network bandwidth consumption. These steps had a significant impact on UAL’s ability to be in the top 20 of UK universities for sustainability (2019).

Why is sustainability important to you?

We need to use our resources more carefully, learn from history, utilise cutting edge technology and engender social change and activism in order to protect the environment for future generations.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

Higher education institutions should embed a sustainable approach across all levels of the institution, and a sustainable element in terms of pedagogy should be present across all taught curricula.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can ‘do better’ in making progress with sustainability?

Sustainability within technology is often hidden from sight, such as commitments from major manufacturers to be carbon neutral, fully recyclable (Apple, Microsoft et al) moving towards cloud computing, software as a service and infrastructure as a service.

However, technology also comes at a cost and the cost of technology in terms of sustainability when working remotely is not well understood. Is it more or less sustainable to work from home or to work in an office? Is it better to use open-source software platforms or standard? What is the impact of being on screen for so long? After such a long period of working away from the office environment are we more aware of our surroundings? Do we care more about our environment? Do we delight in seeing nature in a different way, have we found new freedoms or are we more restricted?

There is a great deal to learn from the past year, how we choose to live and work in the future are entwined with technology which in turn (hopefully) will enable sustainable societal change.



“As sustainability is synonymous with social responsibility, it is our responsibility to ensure that all areas of life are talked about, learned about and included.”

Eleanor Cooke

BA TESOL and Mandarin student, Manchester Metropolitan University

My name is Eleanor Cooke, I am a second year BA TESOL and Mandarin student at Manchester Metropolitan University. I currently work as a Sustainability Ambassador and with the Responsible Futures team at the university.

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

In my opinion, sustainability is about creating peace and a better world for us to live in. Whether that be regarding the environment or social responsibility, I think that sustainability is about making the right decisions that will benefit the entire world and not just ourselves as individuals. The picture that I have chosen is a picture which I took whilst living in Spain and it is a photo which makes me feel calm, happy and peaceful, which is what I like to imagine sustainability should represent. This picture depicts the wonderful way in which our world works and how we should want to keep enjoying these moments, by creating a sustainable future for each other.

Why is sustainability important to you?

Sustainability is important to me because I think that it is about being selfless, looking after one another and thinking about other people instead of just ourselves. In our current society, it is very easy to get caught up in our lives and forget the more pressing issue at hand, which is how to create a more sustainable future. I find it very empowering when we all get together and discuss these important issues, as it shows that we are willing to change and to use our privilege in order to help others. It is important to me that I am always learning more about how to create a sustainable life as I know that each action I take can influence and impact someone else's life.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

Higher education institutions need to incorporate sustainability into the core curriculum so that it is accessible to all students and staff. Sometimes there is a stigma around caring about sustainability, so I think that learning about sustainability from a younger age is the best option. Hopefully then, we would be aware of the impact of all our actions, therefore it would become normal for us to think about how sustainable our life choices are. The incorporation of workshops, extra credit work and placement weeks would also be highly beneficial, as it would allow students to witness and learn about the different strands of sustainability.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can ‘do better’ in making progress with sustainability?

I think that higher education institutions need to advertise their connections and the opportunities that they offer relating to sustainability on a wider scale. Decolonising the curriculum is also a key element in creating a more inclusive and representative view of society and sustainability. As sustainability is synonymous with social responsibility, it is our responsibility to ensure that all areas of life are talked about, learned about and included. Furthermore, we need to engage with the higher members of staff, as that is where the funding is and how we can then create more learning points.



“.. if we all work together and put the time, effort and thought in now, we will all benefit in the long term.”

Dr Kate Mori

Quality and Standards Specialist, QAA

What does sustainability mean to you and how does your photo depict this?

My picture depicts a community garden which involves working together, nurturing and investing time and effort into something that will ultimately bring benefits for all involved with the project. For me, that is a good metaphor for sustainability – if we all work together and put the time, effort and thought in now, we will all benefit in the long term. Ultimately, sustainability is about treating the environment, people and all living things with respect. It has to start with taking personal responsibility for how our actions may contribute to unsustainable practice and looking at how small changes in our behaviour could have a big impact on sustainability.

Why is sustainability important to you?

It is important because the earth's resources are not infinite and there is an urgent need to protect the environment, halt the pace of biodiversity loss and address the widening gap between rich and poor. A new lens is needed that considers the environmental and social costs of focusing on profit maximisation at the expense of everything else and moves society towards a more equitable and thoughtful future.

How should higher education institutions teach about sustainability so that it is inclusive and relevant to everyone?

Sustainability within the curriculum can be enhanced by using 'real world' examples that students can relate to, and that will be inclusive and relevant for everyone. Inclusivity can be achieved by emphasising the interconnectivity of economic, social and environmental issues and how they apply to the subject area. In this respect, a multidisciplinary approach has much to offer and can encourage both staff and students to see things from different perspectives. Working across disciplines can help us move away from the perception that sustainability is solely about climate change and the associated scientific approaches of addressing it. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can help frame sustainability within teaching and learning in its broadest sense and provide the starting point for multidisciplinary conversations.

What other ideas or concerns do you have about sustainability and about how students and staff in higher education institutions and research institutes can 'do better' in making progress with sustainability?

Sometimes the hardest thing about education for sustainable development can be getting started. In this respect, the latest Education for Sustainable Development Guidance, a joint publication by QAA/Advance HE can help. The guidance, being published on 29 March 2021, discusses how the SDGs can be an entry point for sustainable development within the curriculum and the competencies and learning outcomes to advance sustainability. Everyone has their part to play and I suppose it is a similar comment to earlier, in that it is about taking personal responsibility to look at how sustainability can be addressed within our own teaching and learning. Small steps that can make a big difference.

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