

Guide to ESD in practice

Co-creating sustainable solutions with external partners: the Warwick Sustainability Challenge (WSUsC)

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1. Intended outcomes

The project is designed to engage students and staff (both academics and personal support services, PSS) to participate in a challenge identified by a local council (or any other external stakeholder interested in sustainability related issues and co-creation). The practice aims at:

1. Offering guidance for institutions on ways to engage students and staff (academic and professional support services (PSS)) in a critical discourse on sustainable development.
2. Promoting co-creation and interdisciplinary collaboration between students and staff to enhance their sense of belonging within the institution and the local community.
3. Providing an example of a more holistic approach to sustainability in HE, linking the teaching, and learning provision (curriculum), to values and ways of working and studying on campus, and the local community by engaging with local people and partners.
4. Introducing participants to design thinking to develop sustainability competences and innovation skills.
5. Placing students at the centre of the co-creation and innovation dialogue while connecting them with real-life issues that humanity is currently facing.

2. Participants

We suggest participation is capped at 15 teams and 75 participants to ensure the right level of support throughout the process. An interdisciplinary approach guarantees that the localised expertise across the institution is drawn on to promote knowledge exchange and integration for students and staff. The project team should comprise:

1. Project Co-Leads and Student Project Officers (SPO) who will identify and scope out the challenge; recruit student and staff participants; liaise with external stakeholders (eg alumni sustainability experts); shortlist project proposals; organise and deliver training and workshops; build a legacy with external stakeholders to implement the suggested solution; and disseminate the outcomes of the project. SPOs will also be responsible for the delivery of the key workshops aimed at introducing the elements of design thinking as a problem-solving methodology for the challenge. We recommend selecting two SPOs and have a team of two to three members of staff leading on the organisation of the challenge.
2. Student coaches, who will help engage the participants and support the delivery of workshops.
3. Members of a local council (or any other external stakeholders) will help identify the scope of the challenge; brief participants on the challenge; and shortlist teams and ideas for the final showcase dissemination event. We suggest considering a minimum of two project leads, two SPOs, and eight to ten student coaches for the delivery of the project workshops. SPOs and Student Coaches should be offered a payment or alternative rewards for their time.

3. Activity/project

With the support of a local council (or an external stakeholder), the project team will identify the scope of the challenge. The project leads will then work collaboratively with two SPOs (recruited from a poll of current students or alumni) and (a maximum of) 13-15 student coaches (depending on the number of teams, allocating a coach per team), who will be trained on the methodology and some basics of facilitation to deliver the key workshops of the challenge.

The project leads will then advertise the opportunity at an institutional level. Teams will have a maximum of five participants. Ideally, each team should have two members of staff and two to three students, for a total of 75 staff and students working in 15 teams across the institutions. Students studying at all levels and staff (both academics, and personal support services (PSS) staff) are welcome to participate in the challenge. They can choose to sign up to take part in the challenge as an individual and be allocated into a 'wild card' team or as an already formed 'departmental team'. Applications will be scrutinised by the project leads who will also be responsible for wild card allocation and make any last-minute changes if needed. Be prepared for attrition and last-minute dropouts.

After teams are formed, participants will be informed of their allocation and will be required to attend two three-hour workshops.

- a. An introductory workshop where participants will be introduced to the challenge and provided with the basic knowledge of design thinking for problem solving. The first two key stages of the methodology will be covered here (ie empathise and define), where teams will be asked to think about the problem based on their initial assumptions, existing knowledge, and experience of sustainability issues. At this stage, all participants will be allocated into random teams to ensure the challenge benefits from diverse and interdisciplinary thinking.
- b. A reframing and refining workshop where participants will focus on the next stages of design thinking (ie define and ideate). By returning to their departmental or wild card teams, participants will work on framing a problem using insights from the introductory workshop. This will allow the teams to sharpen the key questions they might want to address as part of the challenge.

During the challenge (15 days in total) participants will be supported by the members of the project team, and, at the end of the challenge, all teams will submit their suggested ideas and solutions. This could be either a poster or a PowerPoint presentation or a written summary of the identified solution. A video can also complement the submissions. A judging panel will scrutinise all entries and, based on selected criteria, shortlist up to five teams to present their ideas at the final showcase event. To incentivise participation, we advise to provide prizes for participants (at a minimum, three prizes for the best three solutions). Feedback will be collected at the end of the challenge to measure the impact of the activity on the participants.

4. Assessment or evaluation

Survey data can be collected to measure the impact of the challenge on participants. The survey may include questions surrounding:

1. The students' experience on co-creating solutions to a real-life problem with members of staff, and how this affected their sense of belonging to the institution and the local community.
2. Any insights into the university decision-making process acquired throughout the whole experience.
3. Their learning process in terms of acquiring new sustainability competences and innovation skills.

Based on data we collected from the Warwick Sustainability Challenge, more than 70% of those who took part in the survey stated that the challenge changed their ability to evaluate a complex problem with a diverse and global mindset (system thinking and anticipatory/exploratory competency); reflect on their own actions (problem framing and self-awareness competency); work with and learn from others (collaborative competency); develop innovative ideas (system thinking and strategic competency); reflect on their personal values and how they align with a complex problem like sustainability (valuing sustainability competency).

Participants also said that the experience enhanced their sense of belonging to the institution and the local community.

Students said:

"I was able to bring my personal point of view...I learned a lot in the whole process...[including]...the ability of teamwork and independent innovation...."

"The bottom-up approach is a smart way...to hear students' voice...and make students' ideas come true. This is a great way to promote sustainability in Warwick."

"It helped me to integrate better within the...community."

5. Useful resources

Links to MS forms for registration:

[Duplicate/reuse the sign up form](#)

[Duplicate/reuse the output submission form](#)

Slides for running the workshops:

[Workshop 1](#)

[Workshop 2](#)

[Templates for activities and Week 2 daily prompts.](#)

6. Example of practice

The Warwick Sustainability Challenge saw 70 students and staff (both academics and professional support services) working in teams to co-create ideas to tackle a real sustainability challenge in Coventry. The challenge was created in partnership with Coventry City Council and saw members of staff in eight different departments at Warwick engaging in the project on local public transport. Built on an experimental methodology with elements of design thinking, it was to prototype and test a more holistic approach to sustainability in HE. The challenge engaged participants in two three-hour online workshops in June 2022, supplemented with support sessions, drop ins and nudges from a team of facilitators, coaches and a panel of alumni sustainability experts, as well as thought leadership from the Coventry City Council, Warwick Estates and the Global Sustainable Development Department.

The workshops, built on the design thinking methodology, facilitated a collaborative approach to reframing a sustainability challenge, and coached participants to explore it in an innovative way. After the workshops, the challenge lasted for additional 10 days (two weeks in total) with teams collaborating asynchronously. The challenge culminated in the submission of teams' outputs and ideas either in the form of an e-poster or a presentation, and a video. Eight interdisciplinary (wild card) and departmental teams submitted their outcomes, of which five were shortlisted for the final showcase event. Information about the Warwick Sustainability Challenge and entry submissions can be [found here](#).

Among other things, the challenge:

1. Was successfully replicated with 60+ student participants working on a campus waste challenge in November 2022. A link to the waste challenge can be [found here](#). The transport and the waste challenges engaged 15+ departments, trained and upskilled a range of staff and student design thinking facilitators and coaches from across the

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2. University, as well as alumni sustainability focused entrepreneurs. Warwick continues to work with the local council on the next challenge and opportunities to develop
3. sustainability competences and design thinking skills among local sustainability leaders and champions.
4. Created opportunities for wider training, planned to build institutional capacity for delivering the challenge regularly.
5. Impacted the wider Warwick community and increased awareness around education for sustainable development (ESD) contributing to the establishment of a university Sustainability Hub and ESD Network.
6. Launched a national network of educators working at the intersection of sustainability, education and design, and created opportunities to work in collaboration with schools and engage pupils in design thinking for sustainability.
7. Influenced a Sustainability Challenge team and 50+ students at a university in Latvia, creating an ESD scholarship partnership between the two institutions.
8. Helped to secure funding for a subsequent project, training staff from six universities in the UK on the use of design for student engagement.

If you have any questions on the material shared on this guide, please contact Lory Barile (Lory.Barile@warwick.ac.uk) and Bo Kelestyn (Bo.Kelestyn@wbs.ac.uk)

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