

Embedding course content to improve student awareness of sustainable development and related employability issues

Abstract

The 2007 report for the Higher Education Academy by *StudentForce for Sustainability* indicated that employers are increasingly looking for graduates with skills related to social and environmental responsibility. The report also highlighted the need for HEIs to address the issues around providing opportunities for students to develop these skills.

Here we report on a project funded by the Higher Education Academy which aimed to assess the impact that embedding sustainable development (SD) into the curriculum has on students' awareness of sustainability and environmental issues. We also investigated their understanding of how this relates to their future employability.

The presentation will compare discipline-specific and generic aspects of the links between employability and sustainability skills through looking at approaches to embedding sustainability skills in both Computer Science and Career Management Skills modules. The Career Management Skills modules are delivered online to students across the institution whereas the Computer Science module is delivered in a more traditional mode, by face-to-face delivery, within a single discipline area. The different approaches adopted in these case studies illustrate how the curriculum can be readily developed to include learning for sustainability.

The Career Management Skills modules provided by the Careers Service look at the factors underlying changes in the work environment and also raise with the students the importance of environmental & ethical issues and the skills required to face these changes. Another aspect of the relationship between employability and sustainability will be addressed through reviewing the requirements of professional accreditation bodies, in terms of competencies and ethical standards for SD to be included in the curriculum.

We present some results of a survey of students' perceptions of sustainability within their learning. Initial results suggested that whilst approximately 50% of the students were aware that as a professional practitioner they would be expected to take account of the social and environmental impact of their work, many of them were unclear as to what is meant by sustainable development. Therefore consideration should be given to the terminology used, especially when working across disciplines, so that it does not raise a barrier to engaging with the issues.