

Greening Business: Giving graduates the skills to improve environmental performance in their future workplaces

Abstract

This workshop will focus on the development and delivery of curriculum material aimed at providing students in higher education with the knowledge, understanding, values and skills to drive positive environmental change in their future workplaces. The workshop will be based on curriculum developments carried out at Keele University which aim to provide practical, skills-based, employability-related sustainability education available to students from any subject discipline. The workshop will be based on an evaluation of the experiences of these curriculum developments of students and staff at Keele, covering the range of material and topics that can be covered in similar curriculum developments, examples of different teaching activities and materials, and discussion of the benefits of these curriculum approaches to students, staff, institutions, local and global industries and wider society.

Many organisations are now beginning to realise the benefits of addressing their environmental and sustainability responsibilities and are responding to governmental and customer demands for more sustainable business practices. Organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors are therefore now looking for graduates who can help them adapt their policies and practices to meet these sustainability objectives, making sustainability literacy a growing area of employability skills.

Skills-based learning for sustainability, has traditionally taken place through Continuing Professional Development education rather than through mainstream higher education curricula and despite an increasing emphasis on employability in higher education and a growing awareness of the contribution to a sustainable society that higher education can make through the skills and knowledge of its graduates, there is a current paucity of courses clearly linking employability and sustainability within the higher education curricula. Although there are many examples of sustainability-related modules as part of specific degree programmes there is a growing requirement to provide opportunities for sustainability education to students from *all* discipline backgrounds. As all businesses and organisations are required to address environmental and sustainability issues, curriculum developments focussed around generic business practices are applicable to *all* students and have the potential to engage even non-environmentally-minded students.

The 'greening business' curriculum developments at Keele has been developed and taught in close collaboration with environmental professionals in local industries and organisations in order to ensure the relevance of the syllabus to the real working environment. The 'greening business' curriculum covers the environmental responsibilities of businesses and organisations; the benefits of (and barriers to) implementing environmental and sustainability practices and policies within an organisation; an understanding of basic sustainability concepts such as life cycle analysis; and a basic training in environmental auditing. The University campus is used as both a case study and practice ground to extend students' understanding and skills in these core areas, providing linkages between the campus and curriculum.

To date, these curriculum developments have proved popular, particularly for students on Geography/environment-related and business-related courses, providing an alternative and complementary angle to their chosen degree routes. There are a wide range of potential benefits to students, institutions, employers and wider society of 'greening business' related curriculum developments. These include: improved student awareness of sustainability-related employment opportunities; engagement in sustainability education of non-environmentally-minded students; greater linkages between campus and curriculum sustainability developments through environmentally auditing of the educational institution; graduates who can drive positive environmental change in the workplace, hence contributing to a more sustainable society; and positive changes in students' individual environmental practices/behaviour resulting from enhanced awareness of environmental issues.