



University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Green Academy case study





Case study

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Key features:

- making sustainability a unique selling point for a new institution;
- focusing on high-level leadership with sustainability at the heart of the strategic vision;
- engaging with faculty management teams to demonstrate the potential for sustainability within every discipline;
- developing sustainability programmes in every faculty;
- embedding sustainability in a proportion of every student's experience.

Context

Institutional change provides an essential context for understanding the participation of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in the Green Academy. The University was created in November 2010 through the merger of University of Wales Lampeter and Trinity College. It has campuses in Carmarthen, Lampeter and London. This institutional development is part of a wider strategy being developed in South West Wales to form a new dual-sector University of Wales Trinity Saint David, which will also embrace Swansea Metropolitan University and Coleg Sir Gar and have formal relationships with a number of further education colleges. The aim is to construct a regional educational group structure working to a single educational plan to realise the benefits of bringing together further and higher education in the form of a new, collegiate, dual-sector university.

At the time of the Green Academy, the institution had already identified sustainability as having the potential to act as the new University's unique selling point. The sustainability agenda resonated with the strong shared ethics and values of an institution with religious origins and deep roots in the community, being based on the oldest universities in Wales, and one of the largest teacher education providers in the UK. It could also help to bind together what is intended to be a unique framework in which to deliver education from initial teacher education through further education to higher education and research on the international stage. In addition, a strategic appointment had already been made in the form of the Commissioner for Sustainable Futures and Chair to the Climate Change Commission in Wales as a Professor of Practice. The institution already had a

good understanding of the distribution of sustainability-related skills among its staff since a survey by HEFCW had shown that 25% of staff had relevant skills. Strategic partnerships were also being formed: a memorandum of understanding between the University and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors had been agreed to work together on rural sustainability and landscape management in Wales and a similar memorandum with the Health Board to develop innovative, sustainable rural health practice.

At the level of activity, the University had a long pedigree in disciplines with a traditional environmental focus, as in outdoor education. Programmes with a strong focus on education for sustainable development included a BSc in Green Information Technology and a BA in Managing Civil Society Organisations. The University was also leading a Knowledge Exchange Partnership researching the socio-economic impacts of developing offshore renewable energy.

At the same time, much activity was disparate and highly varied, and the question for the institution was how to pull such activity together when it is so multi-faceted. Furthermore, it faced the challenge of upgrading building stock much of which was of poor quality and fell short of sustainability benchmarks, and was implementing a multi-million pound redevelopment programme incorporating sustainable building materials and alternative energy sources.

Impact of the Green Academy

The Green Academy came at a 'perfect time' for the institution. Having already decided that the sustainability agenda could provide the glue for binding the new institution together, Trinity Saint David decided that its Green Academy team should include representation of the highest levels of leadership and therefore included the Vice-Chancellor and a member of the governing body. The team was led by its Professor of Practice. Unlike other institutions taking part in the Green Academy, Trinity Saint David did not have a major representation in the sustainability field nationally or internationally and therefore participation was seen as particularly prestigious and was used prominently in the publicity surrounding developments at the time and subsequently. The Green Academy helped to both raise the profile of and validate the sustainability agenda in the institution. It gave confidence to the institution and acted as a catalyst.

The Green Academy shaped thinking about how to take forward sustainability strategically. In February 2011 the institution had announced that the new University was ambitious to lead the Welsh agenda on sustainability and was seeking expressions of interest to develop a new Wales Institute for Sustainability. Fifty expressions of interest had been received and in March – around the time of the Green Academy residential meeting – the bid led by a former Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing in the Welsh Assembly Government was selected, which was supported by the leader of the Green Academy team. Over the period up to September 2011 the concept of INSPIRE (the Institute for Sustainable Practice, Innovation and Resource Effectiveness) was developed, and its prospectus was formally launched in January 2012: "putting sustainability at the heart of the new University's strategic vision".

The Green Academy team was able to learn from others. In preference to having a strategic-plan-based approach or building an institution with many staff, it was decided to develop INSPIRE as a 'virtual' institute led by a high-profile director (the former Welsh Assembly Government Minister) who would engage with heads of faculty as critical 'gatekeepers' and, over time, develop a cohort of academics who would be branded 'INSPIRE'. This approach made the most of the specific opportunity provided by the process of creating a new university to craft strategic messages and build them in to the new structures. Subject to the new governing body's agreement, the new University will have, alongside INSPIRE, a pro-vice-chancellor responsible for sustainability and a sustainable development group on each campus. Sustainability matters will go straight to the main Strategy Committee and to Senate.

Furthermore, in the curriculum, INSPIRE makes some substantial commitments including the following:

- each faculty will offer one new undergraduate and one new postgraduate course for the 2013 student intake;
- sustainability will be embedded into 15% of all students' experiences by Autumn 2013, creating a distinctive 'One Planet Curriculum';
- a ten-credit sustainability 'One Planet Skills Passport' will be developed to be piloted in 2013.

Wherever possible, it is intended that new curricula will be interwoven with action learning centred on real issues.

Since INSPIRE's launch, its Director has spent much time engaging with faculties about how sustainability might be developed. The principle here is that buy-in comes from sustainability being discipline specific. Each faculty needs to adopt its own approach based upon its own collection of disciplines and internal relationships. Pushing the sustainability agenda out of its traditional home in certain disciplines has also been an important focus and has led to curriculum development across a wide range of fields including the performing arts where sustainability approaches are being incorporated into theatre design, and early childhood development in initial teacher education, which draws on campus resources.

In the Humanities Faculty a 20-credit research methods module 'Exploring Sustainability' has been developed. The module is taken by all students at Level 5 across the Humanities Faculty and therefore has a wide reach. Sustainability is the content through which students can develop their research skills and is therefore truly embedded: of the five learning outcomes in the module, four relate to research methods and one to demonstrating "an understanding of environmental and sustainable issues as they relate to each student's academic discipline". The module concludes with a student conference held at the end of the first semester, which brings together students from across the various humanities disciplines and has had very positive student feedback as it enables them to see how sustainability might be applied across a wide range of disciplines and in a broad number of ways.

The new Sustainability Institute at Trinity Saint David is a bold attempt to embed sustainability deeply into a new institutional structure. Its goals are ambitious and their achievement relies on strong leadership and the ability to work closely with faculties to implement the new agenda of change. It brings together a clear high-level strategy with a strong commitment to bottom-up curriculum development. Through this balance of structure and process, substantial commitment has been achieved:

Once people realised they could do sustainability in-discipline, then it took off.

Contact us

The Higher Education Academy
Innovation Way
York Science Park
Heslington
York
YO10 5BR

+44 (0)1904 717500
enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk

ISBN: 978-1-907207-59-4

© The Higher Education Academy, 2012

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) is a national body for learning and teaching in higher education. We work with universities and other higher education providers to help bring about change in learning and teaching. We do this to improve the experience that students have while they are studying, and to support and develop those who teach them.

Our activities focus on rewarding and recognising excellence in teaching, bringing together people and resources to research and share best practice, and by helping to influence, shape and implement policy - locally, nationally, and internationally.

www.heacademy.ac.uk | [@HEAcademy](https://twitter.com/HEAcademy)

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the Editor. Such permission will normally be granted for educational purposes provided that due acknowledgement is given.

To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact the communications office at the Higher Education Academy: 01904 717500 or pressoffice@heacademy.ac.uk