

Embedding sustainability through collaborative engagement



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

How Trinity Saint Davids is taking a holistic approach

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University Of Wales - Trinity Saint David

Overview

This SD story shows how Trinity Saint David is taking a 'whole system' approach to sustainability. Engaging the whole university in the project has been key to getting sustainability embedded throughout its operations and management.

Background

The merger between Trinity College in Carmarthen and the University of Wales Lampeter enabled the new University of Wales Trinity Saint David (TSD) to consider its future role and offer.

Results

Identify outcomes that increase the wellbeing of Wales

Evidence

Make decisions using better information

Collaboration

Work with others across boundaries

Long term

Fix the causes rather than the symptoms

Connect

Focus on the economic, social and environmental benefits

Transparency

Measure and report on the difference you make

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

Following participation in the Higher Education Academy's Green Academy initiative, the University Council resolved to set up a sustainability institute to differentiate its offer for competitive advantage based on a strong set of existing ethical values. Prior to the development of INSPIRE, (The Institute for Sustainable Practice, Innovation & Resource Effectiveness), the university had no history of strategic involvement in the sustainability agenda. The current merger between TSD and Swansea Metropolitan University further enables the whole system approach to be taken forward in the new university.

Why

Evidence from the NUS and employer organisations support the need to develop skills for sustainability. Graduates now need a new set of skills to enable them to be fit for the future they will work and live in. Through its participation in the Green Academy programme, the university committed to taking a holistic approach to embedding sustainable development in all its operations and engagement.

What they did

The INSPIRE approach sees systemic embedding of sustainable development at TSD, balancing social, environmental and economic needs in a way that does not compromise future generations. There is strong support of the Vice Chancellor, and a new Sustainability Directorate is established, with the director sitting on the senior management team. The approach was launched through a prospectus in January 2012 with commitments on governance, campus, curriculum, partnerships. The outcomes are reported regularly to Senate and the University Council. At its core, the approach has been to make the new sustainable development agenda as relevant and as exciting as possible to students and staff: revalidating course content to include sustainability within individual disciplines; embedding sustainability in the university's strategic commitments; and by looking for partnerships, e.g., with the Centre for Alternative Technology, to become a beacon for sustainability activity.

How can we reduce our water consumption on campus and at home? <i>Ideas under this topic relate to reducing water consumption, water recycling and water saving.</i>	★ 4 Ideas to rate	+ Idea	4
How can we improve or maintain the sustainability of our buildings? <i>Ideas in this topic relate to how the University's structures can be built and maintained sustainably.</i>	★ 1 Idea to rate	+ Idea	1
How can we reduce pollution at TSD? <i>Improve the quality of air, soil and water environments across the TSD campus that create the conditions that allow all living organisms to thrive.</i>	★ 2 Ideas to rate	+ Idea	4
How can we improve Biodiversity and Green Spaces? <i>Ideas for landscaping the campus.</i>	★ 2 Ideas to rate	+ Idea	2
Ideas to improve the impact of transportation? <i>Reducing environmental impact through development of sustainable modes of transport</i>	★ 4 Ideas to rate	+ Idea	4

Screen grab of TSD's Vocal Eyes platform

Specific commitments are in the university's strategic plans and in all statutory responses to Welsh Government.

What obstacles existed

Due to the already strong commitment to ethics, to social justice and to the environment, both corporately and by individual members of staff, there was no opposition to the university committing itself to sustainable development. However staff were primarily concerned about two broad areas: what the new agenda meant for their existing practice, and how they needed to be involved in its delivery so as not to exacerbate their workload.

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Engagement with all parts of the university, governors, staff (academic and support staff) and students has been a key part of TSD's journey.

What changed

The Sustainability Skills Survey of academic and support staff developed an evidence base of existing expertise, experience and interest in sustainability. 35% of staff completed the initial survey, identifying opportunities for new curricula and research subjects. This approach was important in generating enthusiasm and support for the agenda. In particular, the results indicate that the university could have a significant benefit to regional and local communities, with experience on rural and community development appearing to be a strong asset.

The new 'Sustainability Exchange' connects students and staff with opportunities for taking steps on sustainable change, using Vocal Eyes, an online portal. In the first month, 75 new ideas were generated. New student sustainable living scholarships have been introduced.

Strategic partnerships have been developed to drive sustainability outcomes, including a) with the Centre for Alternative Technology, b) the creation of a "Chair of Rural Wellbeing", appointed in partnership with Aberystwyth University and Hywel Dda Health Board, c) new partnerships with the local authorities to drive sustainability behaviour in areas of shared interest, and d) future merger plans to transform TSD into a dual sector university incorporating Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion.

As a result of all this work INSPIRE won Best Sustainability Project in the first Guardian Higher Education Awards in Feb 2013.

Although both staff and students have been regularly engaged on individual SD activity for many years, there has never been a shared student and university commitment for an outcome until now. Every faculty in the university can now show how their delivery plans are integrating sustainable development principles into at least 15% of their course content which will enable new competitive advantage for student recruitment.

Plans are being developed to strategically increase the links between university research projects and sustainable development. New contracts are being won in relation to this which helps in income generation and builds the evidence base.

The reputation of the university as a destination for SD activity is growing. University representatives are regularly asked to speak at conferences both nationally and internationally. Other universities across the UK including Bristol, St Andrews and Nottingham are considering following Trinity Saint David's lead on the staff audit, which will enhance the evidence base in the UK.

What they learned

Engagement at all levels is absolutely crucial. Regular meetings are held between INSPIRE's Director and the heads of other departments to compare progress and challenges on sustainability; an 'invaluable step' in keeping the conversation current and hearing about the progress that's being made.

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Finding the shared values that people hold as important is vital in creating a foundation for building ambition as well as for dealing with disagreement or conflict. TSD and Lampeter's cultures strongly identified with 'caring'. This allows areas as diverse as adult social care and classics to recognise that they have things in common.

There is a need for project champions so that it is not just seen as a top down agenda. The Sustainability Exchange has allowed champions to grow their understanding and commitment.

The language used to describe sustainable development must be fit for purpose and can vary according to the audience. It is the delivery of the concepts that matter. It often makes more sense to work with words and phrases that are familiar to the audience rather than introduce a completely new language. The Governors, for instance, were comfortable with phrases such as 'future proofing' or 'fit for the future' and 'relevant', that they could identify with the idea of growing globally aware citizens.

Access to SD resources and support, both internal and external is crucial. An early commitment was made to make all of the toolkits and learning associated with embedding sustainability at the heart of the university available through open source mechanisms to other universities, via existing sustainability networks. The reciprocal effects of this are already being experienced through networks such as the Higher Education Academy.

The systemic approach is the only way forward. Delivery across the whole university has been key for TSD engaging many more people on the campus, through the curriculum, and in the community.

"We all want to see more active problem solving, globally aware citizens emerging from the education system. What INSPIRE aims to do at TSD is to inspire the faculty and curriculum leaders within the university to translate this desire into a university wide vision delivered by us all."

Jane Davidson

Contact and Links

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INSPIRE, the Institute of Sustainable Practice, Innovation & Resource Effectiveness
Higher Education Academy's Green Academy
INSPIRE Sustainability Exchange Vocal Eyes platform
Green Impact Universities & Colleges' environmental accreditation scheme
[University of Wales Trinity Saint David home page](#)

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