

UEA Teaching Fellowship 2013/14

Future Skills Initiative: Integrating employability and sustainability skills into learning and teaching

Interim report on progress March 2014

The **Future Skills Initiative** is a student-staff collaboration to deepen employability skills. It has two broad aims:

1. **Articulate the relationship between our academic disciplines and emerging sustainability concepts to inform teaching, learning and research** - to capture constructively the varied – even contradictory - ways in which our academic departments understand and teach about sustainability-related values and topics.
2. **Link sustainability pedagogy, research, and practice (estates and operations) to improve student experience and employability** - to draw together the practical and theoretical ways in which the campus community engages in this area to create a richer student experience, and graduating attributes, informed by contemporary concerns and pedagogical approaches.

This approach supports other UEA priorities i.e. competition, efficiency, internationalisation, student involvement in running the university, and equality and diversity.

Progress against outcomes:

One of the main vehicles for achieving the project aims is the development of the UK's first collaborative student-staff handbook, tentatively entitled 'HOW TO GET SUSTAINABILITY SKILLS INTO YOUR DEGREE PROGRAMME'. Drafted by UEA students and academics supported by four cross campus, multidisciplinary workshops and reviewed at a HEA supported national workshop in February, the Handbook has been designed in a spirit of pedagogical inquiry to explore in an accessible, concentrated form how to prepare graduates for employment in a fairer and more sustainable world. It explores what is to be learned in each discipline (i.e. content) as well as how it is to be learned (i.e. process) as well as the forms of assessment most relevant to meaningful graduate knowledge, skills and attributes. The handbook is an iterative and continually additive process; a catalyst to working collaboratively, rather than a policy document.

The handbook has facilitated significant progress across all disciplines and the process has been invaluable in mapping existing activity and engaging staff and students (125 colleagues are currently engaged in the project). Using a simple template schools are mapping and beginning to articulate future skills within their disciplines which has prompted the realisation that a significant portion of what is needed is already being implemented and significant value can be added through explicitly articulating and developing future skills in a collaborative way.

Development of the Handbook has been facilitated through employment of four student interns, constructive engagement with the learning and teaching strategy, key individuals across schools and faculties, and buy in with careers programmes on leadership, skills training and employability.



The extremely successful February workshop, organised primarily by the Future Skills interns, brought UEA staff and students together with participants from other HEI's, local community groups and business representatives, providing a catalyst for the development of partnerships to support the further development of the handbook. Delegate feedback from the workshop was excellent.

One key pedagogical approach discussed was **Co-creation of the curriculum** with the aim of developing greater student

HEA funded thematic workshop UEA 28th Feb 2014

ownership of and innovation in course content, structure and assessments, increasing motivation, involvement and enthusiasm for example:

- By development of “on the edge of chaos” content allowing freedom of thought and contributions from other disciplinary approaches
- Emphasis of a creative change agenda rather than raw sustainability
- Excite innovation through many discipline viewpoints, new ways of measuring and collecting knowledge and data (including smart phones as data recorders over changing states of surroundings)
- Encourage game playing and fun approaches

A CSED module delivered in March focussed on the development of the ‘edge of chaos’ approach which involves viewing a real-world problem from a number of different perspectives and encouraging practical thinking whilst maintaining freedom of thought: Enabling participants to try out all manner of new ideas and learning approaches and to tackle “solution-focussed solutions” not just “problem focussed problem analyses”. Such activities exemplify the type of experiential learning that will help to equip students to deal with uncertainty whilst being flexible and self-aware. The Faculty of Arts and Humanities are currently considering the feasibility of delivering an ‘edge of chaos’ module.

The School of Education is developing a ‘Future Skills for a Future World’ module focused on silo-busting, real-world problem-solving for all second year undergraduates. It includes an introduction to the concept of education for sustainability and places students in interdisciplinary groups to work on a project to solve a problem identified by a local community, industry or professional host. Funding is currently being sought to pilot and upscale the module to accommodate several hundred students by 2016-17.

Members of the Future Skills Team will be speaking at two national HEA workshops in May, continuing to raise the reputation of UEA as Future Skills leader.

Impact

The handbook process has been extremely successful in capturing this engagement and driving implementation - albeit at different rates and with various approaches within each school. Collaborative development and flexibility have been the two key factors in achieving this. The mapping of existing activity was initially an unintended consequence of the questions posed in the handbook templates, as staff provided detail on how they currently deliver the Future Skills they identified. As a living process the handbook is continually learning and evolving, capturing the new ways in learning and teaching being explored across UEA.

The resulting interest and action has been much deeper and wider than we had anticipated. The process is now moving very quickly and formal campus wide structures are being considered to maintain a coordinated approach and harness the growing engagement.

Next steps: Sustaining the change dynamic

- **Involve more faculty** - work with supporters across schools to build alliances and create systemic change
- **Widen stakeholder participation** - including an audience beyond the faculty to include more students, alumni, employers and the local community.
- **Further integration** - articulate the employability aspects of Future Skills for the Student ‘passport’ - refining the skills and attributes and defining how these will be demonstrated/assessed
- **Web resources** - Education for Sustainability teaching and learning resources compiled on a website for staff and students
- **Develop a communication strategy** to publicise Future Skills achievements