

## Institution

University of Winchester

## What we did

### Institutional Context

Work was led by the member of academic staff who was Academic Lead for Responsible Futures during 2021-2. The context for the study was the University's rapid transition away from the 'University for Sustainability' moniker which had framed institutional priorities for the previous five years. The ten-year Strategic Plan for 2020-2030 had put sustainability at the heart of the University's activities, with ambitious 2025 net zero targets. The University had positioned itself as a leader, with top-down directives ensuring reference to a UN SDG in one learning outcome of every module of every degree programme across the University's portfolio, unless an exemption was sought through programme amendment board. This had been achieved by 2019. On paper, ESD was embedded through the entire suite of curricula. The University's high level Sustainability Committee, chaired by the VC and originally founded to drive the Responsible Futures programme, of which Winchester was a founder, oversaw these processes.

The arrival of a new VC saw the replacement of the strategic plan with one which barely mentioned sustainability, the abolition of the Sustainability Committee, rapid withdrawal from Responsible Futures, and departure of almost all key academic and professional services staff working in this area.

### Initial engagements with colleagues and students

A summary of engagements with the project lead providing data for analysis is listed below:

Date	Attendees	Focus	Supporting Documents
10/6/2022	(Outgoing) Director of Academic Quality and Development	Clarification of institutional priorities in relation to ESD and QA as of AY 2022-3	
4/10/2022	(Newly appointed) Head of Quality	Establishment of institutional position on <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Use of toolkit for validations</li><li>2) Use of toolkit for revalidations</li><li>3) Status of ESD in quality processes</li></ol>	Interview 1 document
4/11/2022	Student Union President	Role of course reps	Interview 2 document

Some key conclusions drawn from those discussions were:

- The embedding of ESD through quality processes were largely 'administrative', a legacy of the top down approach of the previous VC.
- There is scope of more creativity and support for programme designers/redesigners in embedding ESD through validation/revalidation
- There is little dedicated time for sustainability in StAR training – more effort to be given to achieving this

## Enhancements carried out

Enhancement	Summary	Status	Supporting Documents
<b>1: Implementation of recently developed toolkit for programme design and redesign</b>	Few programmes were scheduled for validation, and of these none showed a direct engagement with ESD through quality process, though in fact their content did reflect some engagement. Agreement was reached that all programmes revalidating from September 2023 must also engage with the toolkit and its ESD element.	Ongoing	
<b>2: Enactment of new role for notional academic lead on ESD</b>	Whilst there remains no formal title of ESD lead, there is an agreement that the de facto leader will run workshops or offer additional face to face support for programmes to embed ESD through revalidation from 2023-4.	For implementation from summer 2023.	

Acknowledging that progress was slowed by the institutional de-prioritisation of ESD, and rapid staff changes and restructuring including in the quality office and environment teams, following the new VC's appointment, some enhancement processes are now in train. The current absence of the proper reporting and policymaking channels, which were previously overseen by Sustainability Committee, means that no paper-trail exists for any decisions made after its abolition in July 2022.

- Enhancement of process 1 is focussed upon ensuring strategic consideration of ESD at a programmatic level, to supersede the top down, universal, modular approach and encourage understanding and meaningful bottom-up engagement, even if slight, through programme design.
- It will not be until 2023 that full implementation of enhancement will be possible, with the roll-out of the ESD toolkit to revalidation of existing programmes
- In respect of enhancement process 2, this remains a matter of ongoing discussion, with a reluctance on the part of the institution to dedicate any workload hours to ESD leadership

## Learnings and Conclusions for addressing ESD through AQ and SV

The work outlined above has highlighted several issues of relevance for wider work on ESD.

1. Engaging with senior managers with responsibility for academic and provision and quality remains central to the embedding of ESD. Whilst engagement with individual academic staff responsible for programme design is important in developing understanding of embedding from the bottom up, time is unlikely to be dedicated to implementation without institutional facilitation.
2. It seems likely that two external pressures in particular – TEF and the Office for Students' B conditions – have impacts on the decision-making of those considering ESD to differing degrees depending on institutional circumstances. In the case of an institution which is concerned about the conditions of its registration, its finances and the standing of some of its provision, the implementation of QAA Guidance on ESD is subject to consideration of its contribution to key metrics. Among these are graduate employability, student satisfaction and experience, and relatedly, student retention, progress, completion and award. One key piece of learning is that a sophisticated case needs to be developed connecting the inclusion of ESD in course offerings with student recruitment, retention and employability. Whilst much of this is in evidence in QAA guidance, there is much work to be done in individual institutions to develop analyses of the correlations between ESD and these metrics. A case can be made in principle for ESD in these terms, but developing a relevant dataset will require strategies to overcome the challenges posed by (1) above

## Outcomes and Next Steps for internal activities

Future work at Winchester is necessary to build upon the above, since progress has been slow, and will include:

- Annual evaluation by QO of the operation of the ESD toolkit
- Evaluation of the role of the 'ESD lead' in respect of support for course redesign/revalidation