

Manchester Metropolitan University

‘Sustainability Management Project’

1) Name of institution

Manchester Metropolitan University Business School.

2) Name of the initiative

Sustainability Management Project Module.

3) Initiative outline

The core elective 30 credit module is focused on addressing gaps in the sustainability competencies developed through business management curricula and is taught on UG Business Management and Business Management with Law courses. The module advances students' understanding of environmental concepts, including natural cycles, ecosystems, pollution, planetary boundaries, in relation to organisational management and leadership practices.

4) Context/history/need for initiative

Modules were reviewed against the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP), competency mapping toolkit (ISEP, 2016). The mapping highlighted a need to strengthen technical environmental knowledge and skills. The module was developed, building on existing programme content with emphasis on practice and research-informed knowledge and skills for environmentally and socially just transitions. The module design required cross-faculty collaboration, involving the Faculty of Business and Law, Faculty of Science and Engineering and students and external partners.

5) What happens and how it is assessed

Students learn a range of environmental concepts and develop capabilities through workshops and guest seminars from academic/industry professionals. Students are supported to apply this learning through live projects with large organisations (e.g. Lyreco) and also local SMEs sourced through university networks. Students conduct industry and organisational evaluations, develop evidence-based recommendations, including a strong sustainability business case. The module encourages students to view sustainability challenges as iterative processes, requiring personal and organisational reflective practice. Students are assessed through a presentation, a report, reflection, and peer assessment.

6) Green Skills developed or applied

Students develop a range of technical, transferable and transformative skills including but not limited to, communication skills, empathy, reflexivity, research and project management skills, critical thinking and future and anticipatory thinking skills.

7) Contributions to leverage points

LP1; Students engage with doughnut economics, mapping to critically evaluate environmental limits and social foundations in relation to a client organisation. Students then engage with focused analysis in environmental policy, regulation, legislation, management systems and carbon management.

LP2; Students work with clients to address real-world sustainability challenges through group work, requiring effective collaboration and engagement with stakeholders and change leadership. They define their own position through research, whilst being open to the perspectives of others. Students identify different modes of communication and framing for different stakeholders. The module reinforces the importance of collective action in addressing sustainability challenges, moving beyond competitive approaches, through co-design and co-creation in problem solving and opportunity development.

8) Impact, successes, challenges

The design and delivery of the module through inter-disciplinary engagement, leadership support, and active involvement from external partners has worked well. As has the embedding of in depth reflective practice which in turn has helped further refine the module.

Several challenges were identified in the initial delivery, including inconsistencies in supervision, complexities in peer assessment, communication between students and clients, alignment between project work and assessment criteria, variation in student engagement with projects, and requests for further practice workshops in carbon management and reporting. Through targeted adjustments informed by stakeholder feedback, improvements were achieved.

9) Advice for others

Alignment with institutional strategy and nurturing good will to support inter-disciplinary working and coalesce around shared university strategy is recommended. Being willing to engage a wide range of stakeholders in curriculum developments has evident benefits. Processes of continuous reflection and iterative development aid relevance and quality, despite being time consuming.

Pedagogical tools such as the ESD Co-design toolkit can support curriculum development and a transformative, experiential pedagogy. They also ensure alignment with frameworks such as United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, UNESCO sustainability competencies and UNICEF Green Skills framework. Alignment with professional bodies such as ISEP provides specific sustainability competency objectives, and also longer term pathways and membership for students to enhance their professional development.