

‘Sustainable Marketing’

1) Name of institution

University of Southampton

2) Name of the initiative

Creating impact on an undergraduate, live client Sustainable Marketing module

3) Initiative outline

This is a second year, UG optional module, Sustainable Marketing, on the BSc (Hons) Marketing programme. It is taken by approximately 25 marketing students per year.

4) Context/history/need for initiative

When teaching future marketing professionals, we consider it imperative to provide opportunities to co-create solutions that reduce, or design-out negative impacts of business and marketing on economies, societies and the environment. This module challenges students to interrogate the status quo, adopt small, actionable changes and consider their future as sustainability thought leaders. Working with clients enables students to develop industry-relevant, transferable, personal and professional skills.

5) What happens and how is it assessed

Students research and devise a range of novel solutions from short-term, incremental changes, right up to transformative and disruptive solutions, for live clients. Clients are sourced through the module leader’s networks, and have included internal careers service staff, start-ups and social enterprises, and a large corporate.

The module is assessed in two parts: 1) students go to CMSTP www.canmarketingsavetheplanet.com, choose and engage with 100 points worth of CMSTP’s Learning Zone resources ; apply to the site authors to gain a Sustainable Marketer certificate; then write a reflection on the new knowledge and skills acquired, and 2) Using the learning from task 1, they respond to one of the live client projects, defining the key challenges and proposing three actionable, sustainable marketing recommendations.

6) Green Skills developed or applied

Technical: Data analysis, entrepreneurship, environmental knowledge and awareness, innovation, marketing, research skills

Transferable: All on the UNICEF list

Transformative: Disruptive vs normative thinking, environmental stewardship, future and anticipatory thinking, reflexivity, respecting diverse viewpoints, systems thinking, working within complexity

7) Contributions to leverage points

The module supports students to have an influence on Leverage Points 2,4,5,&7. For example:

LP 2 Stakeholder communications and engagement: task 1 requires students to communicate professionally with the CMSTP and task 2 requires students to ask insightful questions of the client projects.

LP7 Resilience and values-based futures mindset: one of the lectures is delivered as a Green Futures workshop challenging students to align their personal and professional values to selected UN SDGs.

8) Impact, successes, challenges

The two tasks require a high level commitment from students. All have passed the module to date. A credible, employability boosting impact for students is gaining the #CMSTP sustainable marketing certification. Students have used this recognition on their LinkedIn profiles, for other employability purposes, and even for on-campus activism!

Task 1 requires students to define three personal and professional sustainable lifestyle swaps. For example:

"After the Green Futures workshop, I have decided to apply the UN SDGs for both my personal and professional choices going forward. For example, I will buy local and opt for packaging-free alternatives, and I will buy my work outfits for my placement year from second-hand retailers"

We also plan a longitudinal tracking study to explore if past cohorts are actively implementing their commitments.

Students' client recommendations have already been implemented e.g. the (Business School's) Talent Development Programme (a past client) now expects all speakers at networking events to explain how sustainability is embedded within their roles. Where possible, speakers are selected from organisations with B Corp status.

Three module case studies were also published in the university's corporate SDG report 24/25: <https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/508166/> (page 20).

Challenges include having no budget for guest speakers, and 24/25 vs 25/26 cohorts engaging very differently, with the former being highly interactive and energised, whilst the latter were more subdued.

9) Advice for others

- Connect with the authors of the core textbook adopted; ask for guest sessions, resources, events and offer to collaborate
- Go to events (travel sustainably or attend virtually!) to share experiences and develop collective solutions
- Use live clients – this engages so many of the green skills
- Think about where the students are in their learning journey – prior to your class; at the same time as your class; and what comes next? Align your teaching, learning and assessments accordingly.