

University of Edinburgh Continuous Improvement – Institutional Change Understanding our Impact on the World – Becoming a Socially Responsible University

Section 1 About the project

Summary

Since the launch of its Social Responsibility and Sustainability (SRS) Strategy in 2010, the University of Edinburgh has strived to understand its impact on the world. Through its operations, research, learning and teaching the University works hard to contribute to a society that is truly responsible in action and thought.

Project partners

The University has collaborated with a range of community groups and national organisations in working towards its SRS goals. This has included Transition Edinburgh University, who were partly funded through the Climate Challenge Fund, and S Labs, who supported a sustainable laboratories pilot project, this was partly supported by the Scottish Funding Council.

Section 2 The results

The problem

In 2083 the University will celebrate 500 years since its foundation. How will our successors look back at our contributions to the world in the first half of the 21st century? What roles will Edinburgh graduates have played in stabilising CO2 levels through technical solutions, policy development or business leadership? Will Edinburgh's medical research have helped eradicate major infectious diseases? The decisions we make now will determine the extent to which we help shape the future – or merely respond to events.

The approach

1. Lead by example, explicitly embedding our commitment to social responsibility and sustainability in our policies, strategies and procedures;
2. Actively support best practice, innovation and leadership in relation to social responsibility and sustainability: in learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange and across our services and physical infrastructure;
3. Recognise and communicate relevant activity by students, staff and alumni;
4. Demonstrate and report our main social, environmental and economic impacts.



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Profile

- HEI
- Over 31,000 students and 10,000 staff
- Six campus locations spread across Edinburgh
- Ranked 17th best university in the world

Finalist's case study

Our goals

We aspire to make world-leading contributions to understanding and addressing global challenges. Our overarching approach is to create the conditions in which students and staff are inspired and supported to engage with and contribute to social responsibility and sustainability throughout the University and beyond. Collaboration between disciplines across the University will be central to this endeavour.

Obstacles and solutions

Ownership	The University has provided further opportunities, through improved governance, for staff and students to input their opinions on work related to the SRS Strategy.
Internal Communication	To overcome the problem of departments working in silos, and the lack of awareness among staff and students, the SRS department has a communications team to work towards a better level of awareness among staff and students.

Performance and results

The University became the first Scottish university to achieve formal recognition in the Food for Life Catering Mark scheme, first University in Europe to become a signatory of the United Nations Principles of Responsible investment and it celebrated its ten-year anniversary of being a Fairtrade institution in 2014. The University is home to Learning for Sustainability Scotland, and has now invested a total of £20million in low-carbon combined heat and power schemes – recently opening its fourth energy centre and district-heating network. In July 2013 the University furthered its commitment to this strategy by establishing the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability and appointing a Director.

Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

- 1 Imperative that academic schools and support groups don't work in silos but work collaboratively, share services and exchange best practice.
- 2 Empower staff and students to actively have a role in working towards the objectives of the strategy.
- 3 In an institution where academic colleges and support groups have a high level of autonomy, it is important to have buy in from both senior and middle management to embed SRS within policies and practices.

Sharing our project

We report our progress through annual highlights reports, providing information progress against the strategy (www.ed.ac.uk/about/sustainability/what-we-do/governance-reporting/strategy-reporting).

As a founding member of the EAUC, we continue to provide leadership and support to EAUC Scotland, including convening a number of the Topic Support Networks. The Transition Edinburgh University project provided support to students across Scotland, and this has led to the establishment of similar groups in St Andrews, Stirling, Glasgow and the University of West Scotland.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

The University of Edinburgh is committed to being a world-leading socially responsible and sustainable university. We value working with other institutions as we support our staff and students in improving our own practices. Public recognition gives us an opportunity to celebrate and reward their enthusiasm and hard work.

Professor Mary Bownes, Senior Vice-Principal – External Engagement



AWARDING SUSTAINABILITY EXCELLENCE FOR 10 YEARS

Finalist's case study



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Further information

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