

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Canterbury Christ Church University

Sustainable development is commonly defined as development that "*meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*" The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED).

Education for sustainable development is concerned with providing the skills, concepts, tools and critical thinking abilities to ensure that our staff and students can understand the challenges of an uncertain and fast changing world and respond in an appropriate manner to redress the problems that threaten our common future.

In the context of our university setting, this will include not only education through the formal curricula of our portfolio of credit bearing programmes and certificates, but also the 'informal curriculum' (involving a wide range of extra-curricula activities) and the 'campus curriculum' (leading by example as an organisation in terms of its sustainable management of our human and physical resources, and its interactions with the wider world).

Education for sustainability should involve economic, social and cultural, as well as ecological/environmental issues, and recognise that the concepts of 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' are contested and complex. Ultimately it challenges us to clarify and articulate our values and be willing to engage with controversial issues while avoiding political bias and campaigning.

The key values that underpin education for sustainable development include the following:

- Respect for the dignity and human rights of all people and a commitment to social and economic justice for all.
- Respect for the human rights of future generations and a commitment to intergenerational responsibility.
- Respect and care for the greater community of life in all its diversity which involves the conservation and restoration of the Earth's ecosystems.
- Respect for cultural diversity and a commitment to build locally and globally a culture of tolerance, non-violence and peace.

This represents a vision of education that promotes better understanding of the world in which we live, and which addresses the complexity and interconnectedness of problems such as poverty and inequality, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, urban decay, conflict and the violation of human rights that impact on societies today and threaten our common future. This vision ensures that education for sustainable development extends across all our disciplines and subjects, and is not seen as the narrow province of certain academic areas, such as the geographical and environmental sciences.

This vision of education emphasises a multi-disciplinary and integrated approach to developing the knowledge and skills needed for a sustainable future as well as a critical approach to understanding and supporting the changes needed in values, behaviour, and lifestyles. This requires us to continuously review our approach to education and related policies and practices in order to empower our students and staff to make decisions and act in professional and culturally appropriate manner to redress the problems that threaten our common future. In this way our students and staff can become empowered to develop and evaluate alternative visions of a sustainable future and to fulfil these visions through working creatively with others. Education for sustainable development will aim to demonstrate the following features:

- Multi-disciplinary and holistic: approaches to education for sustainable development will be embedded in the whole curriculum, not as a separate subject.
- Values-driven: it is critical that the assumed norms - the shared values and principles underpinning sustainable development - are made explicit so that they can be examined, debated, tested and applied.
- Critical thinking and problem solving: leading to confidence in addressing the dilemmas and challenges of sustainable development.
- Multi-modal: education processes that are geared simply to passing on knowledge should be recast into approaches in which teachers and learners work together to acquire knowledge and play a role in shaping their environment, including their educational institution.
- Participatory decision-making: learners participate in decisions on how they are to learn and how their learning environment is managed.
- Applicability: the learning experiences offered are integrated in day-to-day personal and professional life.
- Locally relevant: ensuring education addresses local as well as global issues and is culturally attuned to local circumstances.