

Responsible Futures Feedback Report

**University of Chester & Chester
Students' Union**

Pilot Year: 2014-15

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Overview

Education for sustainable development is the process of equipping students with the **knowledge and understanding, skills** and **attributes** needed to work and live in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations.

QAA ESD guidance 2014

Introduction

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The NUS logo consists of the lowercase letters 'nus' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter 's' is partially enclosed by a blue square that extends to the right.The Responsible Futures logo features the words 'Responsible' and 'Futures' stacked vertically in a white, serif font. This text is set against a blue rectangular background with a black shadow effect, giving it a three-dimensional appearance.

Responsible Futures is certification of a whole institution’s commitment to social responsibility and environmental sustainability, and having an enabling environment for it to thrive, rather than an endpoint.

Responsible Futures

Responsible Futures is a certification of a whole institution’s commitment to social responsibility and sustainability and a recognition of having an enabling environment for sustainability learning to thrive. This is achieved through a Partnership between the institution and the students’ union.

The purpose of the Responsible Futures accreditation mark is to provide a framework which will help foster top-down institutional change and develop social norms around sustainability education in both the formal and informal curriculum.

Responsible Futures has been created because, for the last four years, the NUS and HEA survey has consistently shown that c60% of students have either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘Sustainable development is something which I would like to learn more about’, and c85% with the statement ‘Sustainable development is something which Universities should actively incorporate and promote’ (base c15k students)¹.

The Pilot Year

NUS selected 13 institutions to take part in the pilot year of Responsible Futures, including 5 Further Education institutions and 8 Higher Education across England and Scotland:

- Coventry University
- Dumfries and Galloway College
- Edinburgh University
- Keele University
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Sheffield College
- South Lanarkshire College
- Scotland’s Rural College
- University of Bristol
- University of Chester
- University of Plymouth
- University of Worcester
- South Thames College

¹ NUS HEA survey results can be found here: www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/10189

Overview of the Audit

All Responsible Futures partnerships had a two-day audit take place between late April and early June 2015. The purpose of the audit was to determine the partnership’s accreditation level and conduct in-depth research on the impact of Responsible futures through:

- A documentary review of evidence to verify score,
- Interviews with key individuals,
- And student focus groups.

Each partnership submitted a workbook outlining their compliancy against the 40 criteria and alongside evidence for their completion. 10 mandatory criteria had to be completed in order to be considered for accreditation.

NUS trained teams of student auditors at each institution to lead the documentary review of evidence. These students determined the scores, with guidance from the lead NUS auditor.

A key component of the audit was interviews with three key individuals: one representative from the students’ union, one from the institution, and one other (which could be another actively involved member of the partnership working group, a trustee, senior management, or an academic; they should be involved with the university/college/students’ union in a formal capacity, i.e. not a community member or external stakeholder). These informed the audit process as well as providing insights which have contributed to this report and the broader research conducted on the programme.

The third component of the audit was two student focus groups. The student focus groups were for the purpose of research relating to Responsible Futures and therefore its results did not determine the partnership’s accreditation. The resulting findings have been included throughout this report.



Student Auditors conducting the documentary evidence review.

Results and Feedback

“At Chester, I’ve learned that sustainable development really promotes the spread of knowledge. [Today’s students] are the ones who will have to make the changes we’ve learned about here.”

- **3rd year Geography Student**

Your Results

Your Accreditation

The University of Chester and Chester Students’ Union gained the Responsible Futures Accreditation with a score of 159.

Score Overview

| Section | Your Score | Total Possible |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| Knowledge and Understanding | 11 | 22 |
| Partnership and Plan | 16 | 18 |
| Leadership and Strategy | 30 | 49 |
| Policy and Commitment | 22 | 37 |
| Interventions | 33 | 45 |
| Impact and Outcomes | 41 | 80 |
| Outreach | 6 | 9 |
| Self-Defined Criteria | 0 | Up to maximum of 40 |
| Total | 159 | 260* (up to 300) |

*Points threshold for accreditation is 130

Explaining Your Accreditation

If your partnership was awarded the “Responsible Futures Accreditation” you have been awarded the full accreditation. This means that you have exceeded the score threshold of 130 and have demonstrated and evidenced your partnership’s commitment and progress for embedding sustainability and social responsibility across the whole institution. This accreditation will be valid for three years, until June 2018, at which time another audit will be required to re-validate your accreditation.

If your partnership was awarded the “Responsible Futures – Working Towards Accreditation” you have been recognised for your commitment and progress but have not met the score threshold to be awarded the full

accreditation. Through being awarded the “Working Towards Accreditation” your partnership will receive a follow-up audit when you feel that you are prepared to go for accreditation. This follow-up audit, for pilot participants only, will be free of charge so long as it is scheduled before June 2018.

Congratulations on your achievement and thank you for your dedication to the development of Responsible Futures accreditation mark.

**Piers Telemacque
VP Society and Citizenship, NUS**

Key Findings

The University of Chester and Chester Students’ Union have demonstrated an incredible level of commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm throughout the participation in Responsible Futures. Through the audit, Chester demonstrated the significant effort that has been put into furthering ESD within the formal and informal curriculum as well as the strong positive outcomes which have already arisen.

Below you can find the feedback on each section of criteria, but firstly to provide some highlights:

- There is a clear, shared strategy across the institution bridging academics, estates staff, and the students’ union. This joined up approach has fostered a positive and collaborative working culture.
- There are countless pockets of extremely good practice, both in the formal and informal curriculum, which can be multiplied and formalised to build ESD as a cultural norm at Chester.
- Staff across the University and students in focus groups remarked heavily on the increased role that Chester Students’ Union have played in sustainability over the past year.
- Green Chester featured heavily in both the intervention and non-intervention focus groups as a well-recognised and visible sustainability effort by the University.

Feedback

Knowledge and Understanding (RF-01 to RF-04)

| Criteria | Estimated Score | Auditor’s Score | Comments |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| RF-01 | 4 | 3 | Couldn’t be found online, low response rate, but good survey overall |
| RF-02 | 5 | 5 | Way to go on achieving this, we’ll be excited to see the final results/process |
| RF-03 | 0 | 0 | |
| RF-04 | 3 | 3 | Impact can’t be assessed yet as it has not yet been published |
| | | 11 | |

The overall understanding of ESD at Chester will be further established and developed through the upcoming curriculum review. The strong academic grounding in how this project has been approached will certainly allow for greater buy in from the faculties. The student opinion survey was well developed and the leadership demonstrated by students in distributing the survey was great to see however the response rate was relatively low compared to the size of the institution. The results should be shared more widely to create cultural norms around sustainability. Student auditors suggested that infographics could be an effective and engaging way to share the headline findings.

Partnership and Plan (RF-05 to RF-07)

| Criteria | Estimated Score | Auditor’s Score | Comments |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| RF-05 | 5 | 5 | Nice photo! |

| | | | |
|-------|---|-----------|---|
| RF-06 | 5 | 5 | |
| RF-07 | 5 | 6 | Meaningful engagement of the groups which were reached out to, would reach the top score of seven by engaging five or more groups |
| | | 16 | |

The Responsible Futures working group at Chester is a model of good practice for the sector. The high level of commitment and positive engagement of academics, estates staff, and the students’ union, many of whom hold fairly senior roles, is a testament to the truly whole-institution approach to ESD employed by Chester.

The leadership of Tamara Hunt and Christina Cooper in coordinating this group and rallying support from colleagues across a variety of different departments has set Chester up for further success. The balance of academic foundation and actions taking by the working group has created a range of entry points for individual staff and students to feel involved and bought into the project.

Furthermore, the truly student-led nature of the completion of many criteria was a distinguishing factor of Chester’s work. The student auditors highlighted the value of students (or recent graduates) having led the curriculum review and survey process.

The student auditors commented that the strong working relationships established through the shared delivery of this programme should be maintained to further ESD work at Chester.

Leadership and Strategy (RF-08 to RF-14)

| Criteria | Estimated Score | Auditor’s Score | Comments |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| RF-08 | 7 | 7 | |
| RF-09 | 3 | 3 | Well done to the SU trustees for endorsing the strategy. To receive full points for this criterion, further engagement with the University board of governors would need to occur |
| RF-10 | 6 | 6 | The page should be easier to find in the website |
| RF-11 | 3 | 3 | Needs to be finalised and discuss what they have already done. Needs to be published |
| RF-12 | 4 | 4 | Needs to be more of a strategy. Needs more specific evidence of implementation. |
| RF-13 | 4 | 4 | |
| RF-14 | 2 | 3 | Overall really nice communications – especially through the |

| | | | |
|--|--|-----------|--|
| | | | Wednesday Warble and social media. It needs more responses and two-way communication to receive the top score. |
| | | 30 | |

As discussed above, the general approach taken by the working group has proven very effective thus far and seems to have engaged staff and students across the campus. As one interviewee raised, this approach seems to have cut through the typical university politics to rally support and ensure actions take place.

“Every university has politics. The criteria and the way that we’re moving has enabled certain parts of the university to cut through some of the, ‘well we just don’t do it that way’ attitudes. It says, instead, ‘this is what we’re doing, this is where we’re going.’ This has had a very positive effect.”

- **University of Chester member of staff**

From a strategic perspective, the student auditors felt that many of the approaches so far had been bottom-up or middle-out mechanisms for change. Although this has worked well so far in building support for ESD, they suggested the next steps may require a little more top-level action to ensure pockets of good practice can be strategically replicated to ensure consistency across the student experience.

Another strategic suggestion was to engage more meaningfully with the University Teaching Fellows. This could be done through bridging the theme of student retention with student satisfaction, learner experience, and student leadership – all of which are key components of an ESD education.

Furthermore, a more coordinated approach could maximise impact and exposure for existing projects such as dissertation topics. Chester has an excellent track record of engaging students in real-world research and using the campus as a living laboratory approach. Developing a more joined up and strategic approach to this offer could increase student engagement and would give Chester another unique selling point for prospective students who crave such hands on learning in their future studies.

Policy and Commitment (RF-15 to RF-21)

| Criteria | Estimated Score | Auditor’s Score | Comments |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| RF-15 | 4 | 4 | |
| RF-16 | 2 | 2 | |
| RF-17 | 5 | 5 | Limited influence and time scale |
| RF-18 | 3 | 4 | |
| RF-19 | 0 | 0 | |

| | | | |
|-------|---|-----------|--|
| RF-20 | 3 | 3 | Needs better access for new staff to the HR page. |
| RF-21 | 4 | 4 | Needs to make the website more accessible and more exciting. |
| | | 22 | |

Generally, the student auditors felt that Chester had made excellent efforts with regards to embedding ESD across relevant policies. The auditors were keen to see the professional development offer expanded and formalised so as to engage a wider range of staff on an ongoing basis. They also felt that for new students, the sustainability offer should be made clear and succinct and then drip-feed further information throughout the year. Through both focus group and auditor feedback, it was clear that students were aware that there was a range of activities to get involved with but the actual time commitment, actions, and roles were, at times, unclear.

“[The University of Chester] definitely takes sustainability seriously and truly cares about producing a responsible next generation of people.”

- **University of Chester student**

Interventions (RF-22 to RF-29)

| Criteria | Estimated Score | Auditor’s Score | Comments |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| RF-22 | 3 | 3 | Good use of social media |
| RF-23 | 0 | 0 | |
| RF-24 | 4 | 5 | More impact than originally intended |
| RF-25 | 5 | 5 | |
| RF-26 | 5 | 5 | Good use of multimedia approaches |
| RF-27 | 8 | 8 | Criteria completed but the auditors would like to see an increase in impact and reach as a course of 16 within a community of 19,000 is rather small. |
| RF-28 | 0 | 0 | |
| RF-29 | 7 | 7 | |
| | | 33 | |

As discussed above, the student auditors had some key recommendations when it came to recruiting new volunteers to be involved with Green Chester. Specifically:

- Use photos, videos, and interviews of Chester students to show what getting involved really looks like.
- Use language like “Get Involved” rather than initiatives, “Who we work with” rather than collaboration to make the website easily understood by new-comers.
- Be clear about what “pledging” really means as some students thought this was referring to long-term volunteering, others thought short-term, and others thought it implied a financial donation.

As well, students recognised the challenge of communicating beyond the regular audience. One focus group participant suggested using fun, low-barrier, short-term volunteering events as a way to engage a wider audience. Also integrating sustainability information and events into the new Chester Students’ Union mobile app would reach a broader audience.

Overall, students across both the intervention and non-intervention focus group participants highlighted the value that the University and the Students’ Union place on sustainability and the range of student opportunities available. The students who had been involved in the Green Tees programme had outstanding feedback and felt they were making a positive impact on the university community whilst bettering themselves through the development of transferrable skills.

“It’s easy to make a difference at Chester and new ideas are always bubbling up.”

- **University of Chester student**

Impact and Outcomes (RF-30 to RF-33)

| Criteria | Estimated Score | Auditor’s Score | Comments |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| RF-30 | 17 | 17 | Within the time period given, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that collaboration between staff and students has been effective. To gain further points, more emphasis should be given within a formal setting within lecture. |
| RF-31 | 0 | 0 | |
| RF-32 | 12 | 10 | Perhaps more publicity on the fact that the university has divested and turned to renewables rather than just within staff magazine? Impacts and outcomes so far appear to be mostly getting things into place. We would expect more measurable |

| | | | |
|-------|----|-----------|--|
| | | | changes to occur in the coming years. |
| RF-33 | 14 | 14 | For further points, evidence to back up the formal application of individual involvement could be enhanced through undergraduate evidence to compliment evidence from postgraduate students. |
| | | 41 | |

The dedicated whole-institution approach, range of informal curriculum activities, and dedicated and strategic effort employed by the working group have led to great successes in achieving impacts already in this programme. As noted by a student auditor, there are many, many pockets of good practice and the next major stage for Chester will be to ensure these are supported to grow and multiply until they become the norm.

In the evaluation of the impact and outcomes criteria, many of the scores can rise significantly in future years through stronger measurement and data collection throughout the year. As this was the pilot year, much of this information will have been collected for the first time so we strongly encourage Chester to reflect back over coming years to truly measure long-term impacts.

“There are little pockets of good stuff happening across different courses, the next step will be increasing that and actually making it the norm.”

- **Student auditor**

Outreach (RF-34 to RF-36)

| Criteria | Estimated Score | Auditor’s Score | Comments |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| RF-34 | 4 | 4 | The food bank could be more well-advertised so as to involve more students in the campaign. |
| RF-35 | 0 | 0 | |
| RF-36 | 2 | 2 | |
| | | 6 | |

A further outreach opportunity could be to work with the Student Ambassador programme. Tying sustainability content into the Students’ Union content of the tour, for example, would expose prospective students to these ideas even earlier on.

Self-defined criteria (RF-37 to RF-40)

There was no submission of self-defined criteria.

Key Recommendations

Overall, the auditors were truly impressed by the progress made by the University of Chester and Chester Students’ Union over the past year. Their key recommendations for improvement are as follows.

- Ensure that the existing pockets of good practice are celebrated and multiplied. By highlighting existing ESD champions, it will be easier to gain the support of other lecturers, staff, and students.
- Build upon their work to create “campus as a living laboratory.” The existing range of on-campus research projects is significant and by formalising and marketing this as a fully-fledged programme it could be a truly distinguishing feature for the university to make Chester stand out across the sector.
- The curriculum review’s results should inform which departments or faculties to focus on first. Through the review, the partnership should develop a strategy which aims to embed sustainability across all formal curricula.
- Continue to develop the relationship between Estates (Green Chester) and academic departments. This is already being done extremely well through the work behind the curriculum review and should continue to be strengthened through the resulting initiatives.
- Share the results of the student survey and use the positive statistics to create cultural norms around sustainability. Auditors suggested using infographics as a fun way to communicate this information.
- Engage more meaningfully with the University Teaching Fellows and tie together the engaged learning and ESD agendas with the current discussions around retention rates.
- Expand and formalise the professional development offer for academic staff with the aim to engage a wider range of staff on an ongoing basis.
- Collaborate with the Student Ambassador Programme to embed sustainability communications into what prospective students are exposed to.
- Finally, the student auditors made an excellent range of recommendations regarding communications and volunteer recruitment strategies for Green Chester, these can be found in the “Interventions” section above.

Comment from Auditor

The University of Chester and Chester Students’ Union have made significant strides over the past year in their efforts to embed sustainability across the formal and informal curriculum. Through the continuing success and growth of Green Chester, coupled with the leadership demonstrated by Chester Students’ Union, the team at Chester have sparked the beginning of a real transformation around embedding sustainability in the curriculum.

Thank you very much for hosting a brilliant two days. Your organisation and enthusiasm ensured a very smooth, enjoyable, and insightful audit for all involved. Thank you!

Further Information

Frequently Asked Questions

I would like to appeal my accreditation level, what can I do?

If you would like to be re-assessed, please contact the Responsible Futures team on responsiblefutures@nus.org.uk. The documentary review can be re-conducted if the partnership feels that the assessment is inaccurate.

How long will the accreditation last?

Accreditation is valid for three years, so until June 2018, at which time another audit will be required to re-validate your accreditation.

How do we use the logo?

Each institution will be given the appropriate logo – please use this widely to recognise your accomplishment and your partnership's commitment to sustainability and social responsibility. If you would like to provide further information about the programme, please link to www.nus.org.uk/responsiblefutures

What's next?

The 2015 Responsible Futures Awards Ceremony will take place at Manchester Metropolitan University Union on 18th June. Please refer to emails for further details.

Following the awards ceremony, you will be provided with a photograph of your team receiving your award and the physical certificate. We encourage you to make use of local media outlets to celebrate your achievements.

As a part of the pilot cohort, you will receive three years' free support. You are invited to attend the ongoing Support Days, remain on the mailing list, and continue to be an integral part of the Responsible Futures community of practice.

How do we keep improving?

We encourage you to use the feedback from this report and through the audit process to inform your work moving forward.

We would like to visit all pilot cohort institutions 18 months on (Autumn 2016) to conduct a follow-up review meeting. At this stage we would hope to see progress against the recommendations outlined in this report.

The Responsible Futures accreditation will push the sector for continuous improvement.

What does my accreditation mean?

The "Responsible Futures Accreditation" means that you have gained the full accreditation by exceeding the score threshold of 130 (out of 260) and have demonstrated and evidenced your partnership's commitment and progress for embedding sustainability and social responsibility across the whole institution.

The "Responsible Futures – Working Towards Accreditation" recognises your commitment and progress when you have not met the score threshold to be awarded the full accreditation. Through being awarded the "Working Towards Accreditation" your partnership will receive a follow-up audit when you feel that you are prepared to go for accreditation. This follow-up audit, for pilot participants only, will be free of charge so long as it is scheduled before June 2018.

How do we compare?

After the completion of all audits and an evaluation has occurred, a national report will be published examining the results of the pilot. This will outline the key findings from year one of Responsible Futures and will allow you to see the range of outcomes. Individual scores will always remain confidential. A similar report will be published annually to monitor changes in the sector.

Responsible Futures is not a league table and therefore individual scores will not be published. NUS will not share your scores, however, you are welcome to share them with others if you wish.

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