

Student Sustainability Council – ESD (24 January 2023)

Minutes: Joanna Socha

1. Welcome & Aims of the Council meeting (DA)

- DA opened the meeting by greeting everyone, outlining the agenda, and introducing the staff team looking after Education for Sustainable Development at UCL. Simon Knowles (Coordinator of ESD work) and Anne Preston (Chair of Measuring ESD Working Group) joined as facilitators of themed discussion groups.

2. Education for Sustainable Development at UCL presentation (HB & SK)

- In 2019, UCL made the commitment for every student to have the opportunity to study and be involved in sustainability at UCL. Education for Sustainable Development Steering Group, along with accompanying working groups, exists at UCL to fulfil the commitment.
- HB introduced the UNESCO definition of ESD, emphasising it's not just about the content but also how it is taught and the competencies it equips students with.
- The approach to ESD at UCL is four-cornered based:
 - Corner 1: Welcome – all students introduced to concepts of sustainability and how to live sustainably.
 - Corner 2: Classroom – all students receive discipline-relevant sustainability knowledge beyond the taught curriculum.
 - Corner 3: Interdisciplinary – all students have the option to take new credit-bearing interdisciplinary module on sustainability.
 - Corner 4: Extra-curricular – all students have the option to join extra-curricular opportunities in sustainability.

3. Discussion

- Students formed four rotating discussion groups (in person and online) to discuss and give feedback on all four corners of ESD at UCL.

4. Feedback from each group

The summary of all groups' suggestions and observations, per topic:

- Corner 1: Welcome
- **Corner 2: Classroom**
 - What constitutes a sustainable module/programme
 - Engagement in different digital methods
 - Idea: Basic skills module – sustainability lab module
 - Interdisciplinary
 - General then with discipline -specific tailored areas
 - Mandatory or optional? – in 2nd or 3rd year
 - Baseline module in 1st year
 - Embedded in skills modules
 - Shared module on sustainability which is protected in the timetable – module times are well structured
 - Brings in minority groups

- Has a choice between different elements to cover – environmental / social justice
 - Module catalogue: needs info and more detailed tags linked to sustainability modules and pre-requisites/module catalogue needs categorisation more than just schools/faculties – it is hard to understand what sustainability modules are offered and if they can be done.
 - Sustainability modules should be ranked in terms of how good they are! Have testimonies from other students.
 - More flexibility in how students can take electives on sustainability – the places fill fast, can there be places reserved for externals.. can the numbers be shown as to how many places are left? Give data and updates on module filling up.
 - Provide taster sessions and modules on those on sustainability
 - Do something about the speed of having to choose modules and let people put preferences in module choices
 - Banks of briefs for dissertations in sustainability
 - Modules about sustainability mind-set/decolonisation of the curriculum, audit sustainability modules for decolonisation
 - How can we measure the extent of ESD across UCL?
 - Student feedback
 - How many students take modules
 - Opinion polls – how much do students care about it?
 - Tracking trends over time in terms of module choices
 - Comparisons between faculties
 - How can we work with Students on this? How do we promote the living lab programme?
 - Have Green dissertations / green dissertation briefs in all faculties
- **Corner 3: Interdisciplinary**
 - Credit-bearing
 - Mixed response. Some thought strongly not, other that it should be worth a '15' if it were an optional module
 - Not compulsory – preferred model of SU Active Bystander course to encourage participation, ie compulsory if want role in society
 - When in academic year
 - Suggestion that it could be run twice a year (both term-time and the summer)
 - Best point in term time would be the start of Term 1 as many students have started rent contract but not begun studies
 - Not during induction period – already too much going on
 - Year 2 or 3 was preferable to Year 1
 - Shouldn't be in lunch break or reading week – better to have it within course but appreciated challenge of timetabling across departments. Would be more inclined to take dept module, eg Laws and sustainability
 - Easier to do if its in a place where different disciplines are located, eg a student society
 - Content

- Better to build elements into existing modules – cited examples in Engineering and Biology/biodiversity(?) that already encouraged working across disciplines
 - Should be outcome focused; there should be a goal to work towards, eg participants in Arts & Science develop a marketing strategy for a charity. This would increase appeal of course and encourage more to take it
 - Should involve non-UCL actors
 - UCL Institute for Global Prosperity examples: soundbites with theme; guest speakers from other depts
 - What about a joint dissertation?
 - Could it include an animated video?
 - Would it have different 'levels' or commitments for UG, Master's/PG?
 - Asked if would be selective, eg Laidlaw, with scholarship?
- **Corner 4: Extra-curricular**
 - Societies –
 - Develop sustainability awards criteria (e.g., bronze/silver/gold sustainability tiers), including pledges for society to make one change / introduce one activity supporting sustainability; organising sustainability-themed events (with guidance from the Union available); Sustainability Officer role on society committees (optional)
 - Efficient newsletter promotion of society events, especially sustainability events
 - Inter-society collaborations on events
 - Sustainability in societies training and resources
 - Sustainability Council –
 - Highlight access to different stakeholders to promote the Council
 - Informal socialising opportunities beyond Council – with light-touch update on UCL, community-building to encourage attendance
 - Clearly define and state requirements and objectives of Council and Ambassador programmes to attract and maintain engagement
 - Consider changing the formula and opening the Council to all.
 - Communication –
 - Rely on peer-to-peer communication (esp. about Sust. Council and Ambassadors) for more outreach as lack of exposure a big issue
 - Promote sustainability activities and events from careers, employability, skill development, and networking angle to reach beyond already passionate students + incentivise attendance with certifications for employers
 - Embed sustainability awareness and skills in student leaders training as outreach points
 - Email fatigue – students overwhelmed by the volume of emails, disengaged – would be great to refine what you are getting communications about to your interests
 - Sustainability Week –
 - Come back to running the themed Sustainability Week to mobilise student activity and attention around sustainability

- Incentivise societies to create events and activities in the Sustainability Week