

## **Building capacity: Enabling University leaders to role-model sustainable development**

### **Abstract**

Bournemouth University (BU) has been amongst the leaders in UK higher education in terms of its ambition to develop graduates as global citizens who understand the need for sustainable development. It has also led the way in terms of a holistic approach to sustainability which embraces curriculum, campus and community. External indicators of success have included achieving 'Eco-Campus Gold Award' (only five other UK universities have Gold, or above) and rising up the UK based, People and Planet Green League table, from 20<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> place in 2011. Internally, the curriculum validation process has been successful in ensuring that all course teams address sustainability at Course Review; staff development has supported this endeavour. In the community, support has been given to local stakeholders (including Bournemouth Council) to implement the Earth Charter and to local businesses. Although achievements have been considerable, they have been largely driven, bottom-up, by a handful of committed champions. In 2011 a project was undertaken to secure a step change, gain greater leadership support for this agenda and to begin to develop an ethos that this, is a collective responsibility. This paper will set out how a project has attempted to provide University Board Members and Senior Staff with the opportunity to consider how they role model leadership behaviour for sustainable development and secure campus-wide buy in to carbon reduction. An Action Learning approach has provided Board Members and staff with the space to critically reflect on their roles, and to develop coherent action plans for sustainable development. Analysis of the success of the approach and the leadership behaviours identified is provided. The conclusion suggests that while there has been some success, more work is required if higher education leaders are to fully incorporate sustainable development into their day-to-day actions.

### **Introduction and background (the pre-project context) at Bournemouth University**

This paper outlines an initiative led by one institution to engage leaders and those who govern universities in more visible and proactive leadership of sustainable development, something which Tilbury (2011) suggests is needed across the sector.

The paper starts by setting out the substantial progress made by the project lead institution in taking forward a holistic approach to sustainable development. The detail is highlighted to illustrate that sustainable development has been taken forward across the institution in a way that goes beyond campus greening. However in spite of external indicators of success, the approach adopted has been too dependent on the tireless efforts of champions. The project

described in this paper involving staff development for the leadership team and governing body, offered an opportunity to accelerate the journey towards sustainable development.

Bournemouth University (BU) has been amongst the leaders in UK higher education in terms of its ambition to develop graduates as global citizens, who understand the need for sustainable development. It has also led the way in terms of a holistic approach to sustainability which embraces curriculum, campus and community. The approach (commenced in 1999), has been documented in a number of publications (Shiel, 2007; Petford and Shiel, 2008). Early activities were driven bottom up, inspired by the work of champions who passionately believed that sustainable development was such a significant global challenge that universities needed to respond by transforming ways of thinking, working and educating. The transformative role of the university seemed obvious to the champions, but was not shared by the wider university community. The founding group of champions worked from the Brundtland (1987) definition of sustainable development with its emphasis on development which meets '*the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*', to develop a range of documents and strategies to explore what this might mean for a university community, and ways to secure engagement. In 2005, as a result of a Leadership Foundation Fellowship award, a formal strategy for developing Global Perspectives and Education for Sustainable Development was developed and endorsed by Senate. The strategy embraced a holistic approach to the agenda (see Shiel 2007a, pp158-173) around three themes:

- Corporate Responsibility and behaviour – the university as a global citizen with actions relating to social responsibility and environmental management.
- Curricula and pedagogy – embedding global perspectives and sustainable development across the curriculum
- Extra-curricular activities to support citizenship, sustainable development and internationalisation

The strategy recommended the creation of a Centre to act as a hub, to lead developments and to help embed global perspectives and sustainable development into the fabric of the university. Three years later, the Centre for Global Perspectives was established with an academic leadership remit.

Substantial progress has been achieved on the journey. Curriculum Guidelines (developed in 2005, and since revised) have been successful in influencing university-wide curriculum change. All course teams have to consider sustainable development at Course Validation and Review. This does not mean that all teams incorporate the concept equally well, but it does place an expectation that any omission will be challenged by validation panels. Course teams have been supported through workshops and resources (for example, how to include futures thinking, or inter-generational responsibility), tailored to the needs of particular disciplines. Staff development has been substantial and crucial for capacity building. Any institution wishing to embed sustainable development across the curriculum needs to ensure that it features prominently at staff induction and in Post Graduate Certificates in Higher Education.

Activity in the extra-curricular sphere has also been successful seeking to increase student engagement and community participation. The latter has included work with local schools, local businesses, and with Bournemouth Borough Council to support their implementation of the Earth Charter. Initiatives have included stakeholder debates around the tensions between economic and environmental sustainability; partnership events involving youth and

community stakeholders, to consider participation in democracy and seminars to develop understanding of perma-culture, transition towns and a green economy.

In parallel, led by the Environment Manager, strides forward have been made in greening the estates, with actions taken to reduce carbon emissions, waste, energy use etc. Collaboration between the Director of the Centre for Global Perspectives and the Environment Manager has been central to developments, aligning campus greening with education for sustainable development. The Director has supported the Carbon Management Plan, Eco-campus, the Environment Strategy Group and Fairtrade Committee; the Environment Manager has supported academic projects including student engagement. The success of an academic/professional service collaboration has been evidenced by a number of external indicators and awards including: achieving 'Eco-Campus Gold Award'; rising up the UK based, People and Planet Green League table, from 20<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> place in 2011, and nominations for national Green Gown Awards.

External recognition has been well deserved but unfortunately, is not an indicator that sustainable development has permeated the institution. Data gathered through staff and student surveys in 2009 and 2010, confirmed that progress had been made but suggested that: there continued to be a lack of understanding about sustainability amongst some staff; not all students would encounter sustainable development as part of their programmes; activity continued to be largely the province of champions, rather than being a broader concern. Further, it was felt that carbon reduction targets (set by the funding body in the UK) would never be achieved without broader ownership and engagement and more visible leadership commitment. Bottom up approaches which had spurred progress from the outset, needed further reinforcement by top-down leadership; all senior leaders needed to confirm commitment to sustainable development and essentially 'walk the talk,' or progress would stall.

In 2010, an opportunity arose to apply for funding to support such a step-change. The next section of this paper introduces the project developed to move things forward; the literature (or lack of) on leadership for sustainable development within higher education will then be considered, before the project design is described in more detail.

### **The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Leadership Governance and Management Fund project**

In 2010, HEFCE invited applications to the Leadership Governance and Management Fund (LGMF) for projects that would support the implementation of sustainable development across the sector. At Bournemouth, the Director of the Centre for Global Perspectives and the Environment Manager seized the opportunity to develop a proposal. In collaboration with the Environment Manager at the University of Sussex, a bid was submitted for a small scale project with the specific aim of broadening leadership support for sustainable development.

The University of Sussex, like Bournemouth, evidenced substantial progress in engaging with sustainable development, but in common with other universities across the UK, innovation had been driven by a small group of champions. The project bid set out the case for achieving a step change in engagement, by offering Board/Council Members and senior management teams the opportunity to reflect on their role as leaders, consider how they role model leadership behaviour for sustainable development, and to develop strategies to broaden engagement across their institutions.

The project was timely and relevant. The UK funding body's carbon reduction strategy (HEFCE, 2010) had not only set challenging carbon reduction targets for the sector, but reinforced that sustainable development is a key strategic issue which requires '*behavioural change and new ways of working*' (p15). Further, that it '*extends beyond the traditional estates function*' to other activities '*including teaching, research and public communications*' (p8). HEFCE also asserted that: '*Carbon management is a key strategic issue, so it is a crucial area for governors who should be informed and involved in decision making on the institution's approach to reducing its emissions*'.

The application for funding was successful. HEFCE commented that the project was '*a valuable small-scale project capable of having significant impact*' across the sector. The project would not only address the internal needs at two institutions (and then be cascaded further), but in its wider dissemination would potentially address a perceived gap in the sector, in relation to leadership for sustainable development.

### **Leadership for sustainable development**

There is a vast literature on leadership coherently summarised cogently by Yukl (2010) and an equally vast literature on sustainability. There is very little published work on the intersection between leadership and sustainability (Brown 2011), with the exception of a few texts, for example, Parkin (2010), Marshall et al (2011), neither of which explicitly address leadership for sustainability within higher education. Those seeking to develop work which brings leadership theory to sustainable development face a number of challenges: definitions of leadership are diverse, theoretical perspectives abound, leadership theories (and their under-pinning methodological approaches), present a highly contested and criticised territory. Just as sustainable development means different things to different people, with criticisms that the concept is too broad, too complex, too ambiguous and has been interpreted in a variety of ways (Leal Filho, 2000) giving rise to '*a veritable industry of deciphering and advocating what sustainable development really means*' (Kates et al, 2005, p11), leadership has attracted similar press. Given the lack of agreement of definitions and the variety of perspectives involved in both concepts, it seems hardly surprising that the two topics are infrequently drawn together.

Whenever the topic of leadership in relation to sustainability is addressed, it is usually in the form of a plea by authors for more effective and strategic leadership of sustainability. This is particularly evident in the UK and specifically in relation to the UK higher education sector. The lack of coherent leadership for sustainable development is frequently cited, at the same time as acknowledgements that most of the drive and innovations that have occurred, have been down to the work of champions, leading initiatives bottom up (Copeland, 2008; Jones et al, 2010).

Martin and Jucker (2005, p19-21) identify the extent of the problem, in their plea for more earth-literate leaders. They ask why it is so rare, to encounter in leaders *'the qualities needed to enable sustainability: humility, respect for all forms of life and future generations, precaution and wisdom, the capacity to think systemically and challenge unethical actions?'* It is these qualities which perhaps suggest a new dimension to trait and behavioural theories of leadership, which have explored leadership in relation to the task, relations and change, although not in relation to sustainable development. The type of leader which Yukl (Yukl 2010, p456) describes in summarising the most important leadership functions should however, be able to address the contextual challenge of sustainability. Similarly, a 'transformational leader' (Bass, 1985) who understands the need for sustainable development, might conceivably be able lead the required transition to secure a positive contribution towards sustainable development.

Unfortunately within UK higher education there is little evidence of either transformational leadership or charismatic leadership (Bass 1985; Bass 1996; Bass & Avolio 1997) in relation to sustainable development. Sustainable development is often seen as a peripheral activity; most HE leaders fail to see the implications of the agenda for their role. In the UK context, feedback from Universities that Count (2009, p37) indicates that integrating *'corporate responsibility and environmental management'* into institutions remains a common challenge at sector level and low scoring areas of integration include:

- Integration of corporate responsibility and environmental management into strategic decision making
- Building corporate responsibility and environmental management into the development of senior managers. (p11).

The report also highlights that the higher education sector average, is considerably below the business average in these areas.

This is surprising given that sustainability, as Wals and Blewitt (2010) suggest, is no longer novel but they go on to concede that within universities, it is too often *'just another course or research project, expendable if it does not pay its way'* (p70) or limited to *'campus greening'*. In regard to the latter, environmental managers have led the way in greening estates (addressing legislative and financial drivers) but in most universities, this has not been matched by curriculum change (Sterling and Scott, 2008). Examples of campus greening activities influencing the core business of the university are, as Tilbury (2011) suggests, rare. Environmental managers in many cases have operated in a silo; the transformative ways of thinking and working necessary for sustainable development have been largely absent.

Dawe (2005) reported that progress in taking forward sustainable development in UK universities is *'patchy'*. This continues to be the case. The major challenge is *'the institutionalisation of this initiative'* so that it is more than *'one or two'* champions and is coordinated at the top (HEFCE 2008 p xi). More recently Tilbury (2011) reinforces this message and the urgent need for senior managers to lead change for sustainability within global higher education. She suggests that although many have signed up to International

Declarations for sustainability visibly espousing their commitment, leading change requires more than commitment to principles. She concludes that senior management teams hold the key to transforming higher education and ensuring that it contributes towards sustainable futures. Hitherto higher education leadership development programmes have been of limited value.

The Board also has a role to play. The governance body has to be the main advocate for sustainability if employee engagement programmes are to succeed (Brighter Planet 2010).

### **Addressing the gap: the project aims and design**

Against this background, the project described in this paper meets a gap in the internal context of the institutions involved but also the external UK context, where there have been few practical initiatives which engage university Boards and entire senior teams with sustainable development, and little published work on leadership for sustainable development

The overarching aim of the project was to work with Board/Council Members and senior management teams, to raise awareness of the broad sustainable development agenda, with a specific focus on leadership behaviours to embed sustainable development, and actions to achieve challenging carbon reduction targets.

The objectives were to:

- provide participants with the opportunity to increase their knowledge of sustainable development;
- explore the breadth of concerns (in relation to sustainability);
- identify their potential role in supporting culture change;
- Develop approaches to securing commitment to carbon reduction and sustainable development.

The project proposal committed the project team to running two workshops at the two lead institutions and then to cascade to two other universities. The original project plan was to deliver one Board/ Council level workshop, followed by a second workshop for the senior management team. This was subsequently revised.

Buchanan and Boddy (1992) highlight the need for the change agent to manage three parallel strands of activity: the content agenda, the control agenda and the process agenda. In the preparatory stages of the project (Autumn 2010) there were two parallel strands of activity:

- project planning and the development of workshop process and content
- Warm up activities – which included meetings with senior staff, the Chair and the Registrar; a contracting meeting; preparing the way by seeding communication with stakeholders.

Consideration was given to the literature in relation to leadership and particularly leadership for sustainable development. The ‘Sustainability Leadership Relational Model’ (Ferdig,

2009) enabled the project team to develop ideas around possible leadership behaviours which might result from the project; Yukl's, work on leadership and particularly the 'Essence of Effective Leadership,' (p 456-7) was also informative. Although Yukl does not explicitly address sustainability, the socially responsible leader he describes should have sufficiently compatible behaviours to lead sustainable development. Reviewing the general leadership theory literature served an important purpose in preparation: it enabled the project team to not only explore ideas and linkages but increased confidence in being able to talk leadership as well as sustainability, with the target audience. The decision was made however, not to impose any of the models, or leadership behaviours during the workshops, but to let behaviours emerge from participants.

Consideration was also given to the development/learning model, the influencing process, and how to facilitate change. Although undoubtedly it would have been easier to select a 'stand and deliver' method (and some participants might have preferred to be told what sustainability involves and precisely what to do) a passive approach to learning was rejected, as was using cognitive dissonance (Festinger et al, 1956) (which might have been too negative and challenging in the time available). Outcomes from preparation were an emphasis on a social learning approach (Bandura 1977), the potential of action learning (Revans, 1982) for enabling participants to reflect in, and on action (Schon, 1983).

Other considerations included:

- Clarifying the role of the client and their expectations
- The anticipated outcome ( achievable in the timeframe was the development of a model, increased advocacy, the start of a journey)
- The need to understand how Boards operate
- How to surface world views
- The transparency of the learning model (to enable cascade)
- Influencing approaches and ways to 'sell' participation ('thought leadership,' for example).

Institutional workshops were preceded by a contracting meeting, which at the first institution involved the VC, the Chair and the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Estates) the Project Leader and the external facilitator (as credible expert). Potential approaches to project delivery were discussed and time frames. Subsequent contracting meetings (at other institutions) did not always include this combination of participants.

At the first contracting meeting the concept of 'thought leadership' and 'action learning' were appealing to the Chair. The decision was also made that workshops should include the Board and wider university team (at both workshops) to increase engagement and maximise progress.

A detailed facilitation plan was developed for each workshop which accommodated an action learning approach; participants would reflect on leadership behaviour for sustainable development as part of a learning journey which would develop strategy and implement change. Figure 1 shows the outline of the plan, although plans were much more detailed.

## **Figure One INSERT HERE PLEASE**

Each plan was approved by the Chair before the workshops.

A substantial amount of time then went into negotiating participants' availability, working through the registrar. The first workshop commenced January 2001, with a gap of at least three months between workshops.

The workshops were facilitated by the project team which comprised: the project leader (an internal academic, champion of this agenda, with change management expertise), the external consultant (a former Education for Sustainable Development, UK Commissioner) and the two Environment Managers (from the participating institutions) both with responsibilities for the environment in relation to estates, working as a team. The team was consistent throughout.

All outputs from the workshops were captured; notes were made of discussions. The delivery team also engaged in post-workshop reflection, gathering summaries of reflective learning.

The next section offers a description of the project delivery process, with commentary drawn from reflective learning. Discussion draws mainly from the experience of the process at the first institution where the process has been completed; the first workshop (with small variations) was then repeated at the partner university and a 'cascade' university.

### **Project implementation: the first step on a learning journey**

#### **Workshop One**

Carefully scripted briefings were produced for the Vice Chancellor and the Chair; they introduced the project and its significance. This made their roles easier but also ensured that they were 'on message' and already exemplifying understanding of sustainable development. The project team gave a brief formal presentation which articulated a persuasive rationale for engagement with sustainable development, designed to win 'hearts and mind (rather than evangelistic), and emphasising the payback. The content included an introduction to sustainable development, the external context, the drivers (social, legislative, financial, educational), the institutional context (including alignment of sustainability with vision and values), facts and figures on utilities, carbon emissions, the substantial achievements to date (based on the work of champions), and what might be achieved if activity was scaled up and led from the top.

Participants were then asked to identify the challenges and opportunities of the agenda, from their perception as individuals. This generated a substantial list, captured on a whiteboard.

Again, as individuals, participants were asked to approach the list and vote for the three items (by marking the board), which they perceived as critical to be taken forward as a start. Votes were scored and through a process of negotiation (and collapsing of some items), the group agreed which were the three to four top-scoring opportunities that they wanted to develop institutional action plans around. They were informed that it would be their responsibility to return to the other challenges at a later date.

A 'World-views' exercise, was then introduced to energise the group and stimulate discussion. Participants were asked to place themselves on a line which represented a continuum between an Arcadian view (deep green ecological view of our relationship with the planet and an Imperialist view (man can use resources and is clever enough to fix the problems). They were asked to discuss with those on the line, the rationale for their position, relative to others. They were also asked to consider how world views influence leadership and decision making. Engagement with the exercise was fairly enthusiastic (after some initial discomfort by a few) and participants were interested to see how their colleagues placed themselves. Surprising for the observers/facilitators were the numbers of the senior team who identified with an Imperialist view. Surprising for some participants was the reflection that world-views impact on all interactions and decisions. As one commented “ *I am a bit surprised to see that my colleagues views are very different to my own – a bit worrying given that they bring these views to the table.*”

The exercise was useful in that it highlighted for participants the challenges they would face in agreeing actions for sustainable development. It also served as a reminder for facilitators that such variety of perspectives would necessitate different approaches when seeking to appeal for engagement.

Participants were then asked to select groups to develop actions, in relation to one of the 'top challenges.' In these groups, they first fleshed out the issue and with careful facilitation, articulated the what, why, how, by whom, and when. Figure 2 offers an example of an output from one group's activity, in relation to the strategic objective of broadening stakeholder engagement with sustainability. The action plans identified responsibilities and timelines.

## **Figure 2 INSERT HERE PLEASE**

Participants were asked, at any time during the workshop, to post their 'personal commitments' on a board. Participants were generally enthusiastic in relation to the activity; some returned to the board more than once. Examples included:

- I will ask questions about the carbon footprint of new buildings on campus,
- Go paperless
- Talk about sustainable development more
- Learn to use an iPad and stop asking for paper copies
- Turn off PC when not in office
- Find out what this is all about
- Better facilitate options for staff to stop driving to work
- Embed in local strategic plans

- Carry out research into how students studying in the X building feel about its use
- Consider SD implications of each Board decision (“SD” impact as a standing item on cover sheet of Board papers)

Articulating personal commitments was seen as a useful part of the process. As one participant commented, *‘Now I have written it, I’ll have to stick to doing it’*. Some commitments (the last for example) have implications which will impact beyond the personal; all are important as a precursor to role modelling behaviour.

On reflection the format of workshop one worked well. All participants had learned more about sustainable development and had contributed in a positive way to developing actions plans for further initiatives. Engagement was enthusiastic but had needed careful facilitation to retain focus and engage participants in action learning. The greatest challenge was maintaining energy levels, given that the workshop took place after a lengthy governance meeting. The project team also noted that facilitating an event which involves participants who are at such a high level (in career terms) is highly stressful, particularly when delivery is within your employing organisation. Using an external facilitator (as part of the team) who had experience of working with government was important in terms of external credibility but also in providing anecdotes and stories which engaged participants.

## **Workshop two**

The second workshop was scheduled for three months later. Again a detailed facilitation plan was approved; a further preparation process began, with reminders and information distributed. The content included a recap of workshop one, further slides to remind participants about the breadth of issues covered by sustainable development, pictures to enable members to visualise the institution’s carbon footprint and then group work to review progress on the actions agreed previously, reflection on learning from actions (and their behaviours) and identification of further actions.

The recap of workshop one was important, as there were some variations in attendance between the two workshops. Participants needed quite a bit of prompting and were rather slow in engagement with reviewing actions. It was evident that some actions had slipped off the radar; some had made little progress. A brief presentation of leadership behaviour was then included followed by an activity which required participants to focus on those leadership behaviours which maintain progress, those which accelerate progress, and those which block. Finally, they were asked to think about ‘infra-structure’ issues that would need to be addressed to move forward. A plenary session captured overall comments on direction and issues.

Post-workshop reflection revealed that all facilitators found the second workshop much harder than workshop one. Motivation levels seemed lower but again the workshop had followed a particularly heavy governance meeting. It was evident that although some work had been done in between workshops, some participants had done far less, which impacted on

engagement. At times, the silences were uncomfortable and it was difficult to avoid stepping in to fill the gaps, however the decision to let participants experience some discomfort, was an important one. As one participant commented: *‘actually the leadership behaviour was a negative ‘forgot to take action’- hardly inspiring, will need to do better.’*

An assumption had also been made that participants would have a clear understanding of effective leadership and some understanding of leadership theory. This was not the case. As one participant suggested *‘we make leadership decisions all the time but that does not mean we have ever read anything about leadership. I’ve learned by doing, as have many others’*. Participants struggled at times to identify leadership behaviours, which was surprising. The discussion was frequently pitched at the level of middle management behaviour, rather than strategic, or leadership behaviour, and was not always inspiring.

The exercise which helped them to think about behaviours which maintain, accelerate, or block momentum was the most fruitful. It generated discussion and yielded positive outcomes which fed into the plenary which captured actions that they would take forward beyond the project. Figure 3 illustrates one group’s ideas. Participants found it easier to identify ‘blocks’ such as cynicism and apathy than they did to identify behaviours to accelerate momentum. They were on more comfortable ground when it came to reflecting on institutional structures needed to move forward, agreeing to set themselves *‘high level performance objectives,’* in relation to sustainable development, and to ensure *‘champions at all structural levels’*.

The support of the chair and several senior staff in exemplifying leadership responsibility for moving the agenda forward was undoubted, appreciated and inspiring. Their clear commitment to spearheading change served as an influence to those who were more sceptical. Some Board Members who had been less active previously also expressed an interest in further engagement.

### **Figure 3 INSERT HERE PLEASE**

#### **Evaluation and learning so far**

Tilbury (2011) highlights the need for leadership development programmes which enable university leaders to engage more effectively with sustainable development. The project described in this paper has been an attempt to address that concern, bringing the senior team and those with governance responsibility together to explore their collective responsibility. The project has already served the intended goal of broadening understanding of sustainable development. The workshops were particularly valuable in providing a space for senior leaders to explore concerns in relation to sustainability, their role in leading and supporting culture change and enabling them to identify actions which would scale up institutional activity, secure broader ownership of sustainable development and begin to think about the kind of behaviour change required to lead the agenda. This all sounds very worthwhile but has the project made a tangible difference beyond that? It is too early to say; the project is still being rolled out to other institutions (five workshops delivered; three to complete) so full evaluation will be the subject of a final report to the Higher Education Funding Council. It is

however possible to share some reflection on the process and learning on the journey with a view to informing others, seeking to engage this particular target group.

The project has been challenging. Any project which involves working with Boards and senior teams is not easy, particularly where the facilitators are internal to the organisation and the underlying message is that there is something leaders need to learn and to do better. As Argyris suggests (1991) the 'smartest people' are not always pre-disposed to acknowledge that they have anything to learn; they certainly may not wish to learn it, from those lower down the organisation. There may also be those amongst the senior teams who refuse to see the significance of sustainable development either in terms of a world crisis, or in relation to university business. It is important that they have the opportunity to air their views but not hijack the session. Facilitators need to be prepared with counter arguments but also need senior internal champions to lend support in group discussion. In preparation the facilitators need to gain a feel for the level of support, identify the senior management champions and begin to think about from what quarters, resistance is likely to come. Enlisting the support of the Vice Chancellor and Chair at the outset is critical. Engaging an external expert (from outside of higher education) serves not only to influence the sceptics but also removes some of the pressure of leading change as an internal change agent. A team approach to delivery which combined internal academic expertise, with the professional service expertise of the environment and energy managers and the sustainable development policy expertise of the external meant that the team was impressive in the face of some challenging participants.

The project's original aim was to deliver a workshop for the Board and then a second workshop for the senior management team; this was never realised. Although diversion from the submitted plan created some nervousness initially (particularly around the logistics of coordinating availability), the resulting interaction from a combined Board/senior team workshop offered some advantages and supported the action learning approach. The Board also had the opportunity to collaborate with a wider group of staff which some enjoyed and this, also served to reinforce that sustainable development is a collective responsibility, which requires new ways of working. It also meant that participants were exposed to two workshops rather than just one session which would have been insufficient for any real engagement. The down side was that a greater number of participants meant that it was easier for some not to participate, or leave early (absence being less noticeable).

Workshop one felt more successful than workshop two. In part this was because participants were confronted with their own inaction in the second workshop, but may also have been because they did not like to reveal their lack of knowledge about leadership behaviour (a knowledge which facilitators had assumed would be at a higher level). Reflection on workshop two also triggered the concern that perhaps while the need for sustainable development had been understood, the action part of action learning had not (senior leaders may be more used to giving actions to others, rather than following them through). In subsequent contracting meetings and workshops more attention has been given to ensuring participants are comfortable at the outset with action learning and to reinforcing that they are the owners of the actions. Modifications were also made for subsequent delivery of workshop two, to reduce the time spent on reviewing actions and to enhance the leadership input, taking into account that understanding of leadership was not at the level assumed

originally. Participants were encouraged to spend more time reflecting on their own successful behaviours, rather than on the negativity of inaction.

The process and materials developed so far have proved transferrable to other institutions, with the proviso that the content is adapted to address institutional context and culture. To date four institutions have engaged and are at various stages of the journey with small adjustments made each time in relation to institutional culture. In relation to the latter, cultural difference can sometimes be huge and has to be considered in terms of preparation (warm up) and during facilitation. Further the politics is different in each institution; encountering the political has sometimes been bizarre, responding as a '*positive deviant*' (Parkin 2010) when trying to take forward initiatives to embed sustainable development is necessary.

Other points to stress include:

- The immense difficulty of coordinating a time slot when there are so many pressing issues on the university agenda and sustainable development is a low priority. Board Members find time in busy schedules for governance; time beyond that is precious so has to be time well spent.
- Access to governing bodies has to be negotiated through gatekeepers who play an important role in agreeing dates and communicating information in a timely way. They can slow down or block a project, or contribute wholeheartedly to success. Communication needs to ensure that they are briefed, support the need for sustainable development and have the right information to enable them to be seen as knowledgeable and professional.
- A contracting meeting is vital to ensure that those at the top (particularly the Chair) meet the team, own the approach, and can role-model leadership at the start of the process. The contracting meeting has to be followed up with full briefing notes so that they are able to talk passionately about sustainable development.

The project has certainly increased awareness of sustainable development, but has it increased awareness of leadership behaviours for sustainable development? During the workshops although participants were given a very brief synopsis of leadership theory, introduced to behavioural taxonomies, the importance of inspirational leadership and the role of transactional and transformational leadership, no attempt was made to prescribe what leadership behaviours for sustainable development might look. It was felt that these needed to emerge from the participants and their reflection on action. The project evidences that senior leaders sometimes struggle to articulate how they role-model leadership behaviour; role modelling leadership behaviour for sustainable development is particularly challenging. Some ideas however, started to emerge during workshop two and more have been articulated subsequently. Participants suggest that leadership for sustainable development:

- Demonstrates responsibility for the environment in the personal and professional sphere (exemplifies passion; acts as champion; hands-on enthusiasm)
- Encourages multiple perspectives

- Exemplifies creativity in planning for the future (visioning)
- Communicates a 'big vision' for sustainable development and gives a clear and consistent message
- Develops an SD strategy which embraces all aspects of the business
- Assesses all actions and decisions in relation to sustainable development; facilitates evaluation of the consequences of different actions (better decision making/more futures oriented)
- Identifies new ways of working and opportunities to bring in different perspectives
- Inspires hope
- Ensures sustainability is addressed in relation to all papers which are considered as part of governance/Board meetings/committee meetings
- Ensures Board Membership/governance committees include participants who understand and are passionate about sustainable development

Subsequent workshops at other institutions will add to the list; interviews with participants to be held at a future point will capture views as to what they have been doing that is different. Interestingly, a few participants have made contact post workshops, wanting to know more about effective leadership and how to take on board sustainable development; the need for 'passion' and acting as 'champions' is frequently mentioned by participants in communications.

The project has certainly generated plenty of passion to move forward on a sustainable development journey. It has also raised the profile of sustainable development across the wider institution. The very fact that such a senior audience committed two half-days to the agenda, has served as a powerful symbol. Affirmations of commitment to sustainable development by the institutional Chairs who are engaging with the project, will also drive further action in participating institutions, particularly where those chairs hold the senior team to account.

A Deputy Vice Chancellor recently confirmed, '*sustainability is now at the top-table*' and a participant confirmed that '*the Chair is now a visible champion*'.

As the project cascades the number of governors exposed to understanding their role in relation to sustainable development is increasing; the number engaged in action should also rise. The Chair of a cascade institution commented: '*yesterday's session was worthwhile - in fact it was much better than I thought it would be and I can see some real upsides for University X. All the governors seem to be very positive about the result so if the objective was to engage the leadership of University X with these issues I think it can be counted as a huge success.*'

Such comments evidence capacity building. It may however be some time, before leaders are able to role-model leadership behaviour for sustainable development, in their day-to-day activities. Participation in the project has for many, been the first step on the journey. Future evaluation will seek to explore whether (one year hence) all participants are able to identify leadership behaviours that have helped them accelerate the embedding of sustainable development across their institution. Subsequent institutional environmental audits may also

show that some of the action plans implemented as a result of the project, have resulted in tangible benefits.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has provided a summary of a project ‘in progress’ which aims to broaden leadership support for sustainable development. The project has engaged Board Members and senior teams within universities in action learning with a view to developing action plans, and considering the behaviours required for taking sustainable development forward. The action learning approach and workshops have provided participants with the space to reflect on sustainable development and to engage with the concept in a way that has not been achieved previously. This project has been successful in that it has raised the profile of sustainable development within the participating institutions, broadened understanding of the challenges and enabled some coherent action plans to be developed. It does however represent just one step on a journey for change. More work will be required to follow those actions plans through; substantial work will be required if higher education leaders are to fully incorporate sustainable development into their day-to-day actions. Such projects are undoubtedly required if senior leaders’ commitments to sustainable development are to move beyond the mere endorsement of international declarations; they are also vital to sustain and accelerate the work of champions. The innovations led by champions have been substantial but without leadership from the top, it is difficult to join initiatives up and almost impossible to challenge the silos which so often characterise university structures and processes.

If we are to realise the transformative potential of universities to contribute to a sustainable future (Sterling 2004) then senior leaders have to be fully engaged. The project represents a very small attempt in that direction and illustrates that further leadership development is required. The project has particularly focused on those responsible for governance and top-level leadership within universities. It is worth remembering however that

*‘A sustainability leader is anyone who chooses to engage in the process of creating transformative change with others aimed towards a more sustainable future: economically, environmentally and socially;’* (Ferdig 2009)

Until such time as those at the top are fully ‘walking the talk’, others will need to continue championing the agenda. Senior leaders may need ongoing reminders that sustainable development needs to fore ground every aspect of institutional business.

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**FIGURE ONE TO BE INSERTED**

<b>Workshop 1</b>	<b>Workshop 2</b>
Presentation on drivers for SD and current institutional context	Recap of workshop 1; reminder about SD and institutional carbon emissions
Identification of challenges and opportunities	Reviewed progress on goals and actions; identification of further actions required; identification of leadership behaviours
Individuals ranked top 3 priority areas	Presentation on leadership behaviour
Reflection on which three were most scored; amalgamation of priorities as appropriate	Identified leadership behaviours in relation to strategic management then sustainable development
Consideration of world views	Considered types of behaviour which blocked progress; types to take progress forward.
Individual commitments	Plenary
Action plans developed in small groups: what, why, how and by whom.	Concluding comments from VC/Chair

**Figure 1 Outline of workshop activities**

## FIGURE 2 TO BE INSERTED

### Example of Action Development for the strategic objective to communicate and gain staff, student and Board engagement

No.	Action (Broaden engagement of staff/students)	By whom	By when
1	Consult stakeholders/ research what others do	E & ET	ASAP
2	Leadership Team Develops Programme of actions (what, why, etc)	ULT	Next board
3	Develop a communications plan (including achievements to date)	M & C and SUBU	Next term
4	VC launch/ make visible through personal examples / champion	VC and others	Next term
5	BIG statement(s) -remove printers -close car parks -carbon sculpture -bicycles	Board/ ULT/ SU	2011- 2012
6	Discuss and plan roll out of events	ULT/ SU	2011- 2012 (ongoing)
7	Recognition of success -/ reward those who role model	ULT	2011- 2012
8	Embedding in new student recruitment campaigns	M & C	2011-12

## FUGURE THREE TO BE INSERTED

**Figure Three: Identifying behaviours exercise**

### Workshop 2

<b>Behaviours which sustain momentum</b>	<b>Behaviours which accelerate momentum</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a leader!</li> <li>• Passion (sharing), believing in it</li> <li>• Celebrating achievement</li> <li>• Clear sense of mission &amp; well planned strategy</li> <li>• Patience &amp; accepting other people’s work</li> <li>• Treat as a ‘common sense’ action</li> <li>• Rewarding &amp; recognising</li> <li>• Empowering individuals</li> <li>• ‘Highly visible’ champions (including at Board level)</li> <li>• Being carbon conscious</li> <li>• Case studies/good examples to buy in to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive statement of intent</li> <li>• Impact statement</li> <li>• More frequent/ regular updates/flow of information</li> <li>• Recognition/Incentive schemes/Prizes</li> <li>• Understand why you have won eco-campus award – what next?</li> <li>• Personalised message for individual or team e.g. carbon resp./allowance</li> <li>• Enthusiasm of everyone</li> <li>• Lead by example</li> <li>• Mobilise the almost 20,000 people that make up the institution</li> </ul>
<b>Behaviours which block momentum</b>	<b>What institutional structures need to be put in place to progress activity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making a big issue of it</li> <li>• Negativity</li> <li>• Lethargy/Apathy</li> <li>• Complacency</li> <li>• Cynicism</li> <li>• Someone else’s job</li> <li>• Perception there is no show stopper we have to fix/absence of a burning platform</li> <li>• Too many messages</li> <li>• Inconsistent messages from Government &amp; legislation</li> <li>• Non-sticking initiative before next</li> <li>• People too busy/ no time</li> <li>• “Individuals will not make a difference”</li> <li>• Unclear communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No more committees but passionate, visible Board/UET leader and ULT champions – cascading</li> <li>• Three new Board members to be recruited; recruit minimum of one with an interest in sustainability</li> <li>• Meaningful KPI’s with investment to back up (measure + do something about it)</li> <li>• ‘Stickability’ – people, resource, have mandate and skill</li> <li>• Put into a formal project management framework – becoming more disciplined</li> <li>• High level performance objectives at board level</li> <li>• Champions at all levels and recruit to that</li> <li>• Sell space for non-used time</li> <li>• It is a good sound business case to include environment as well as VFM in all decisions</li> <li>• Structures are OK, processes need change</li> <li>• Build into appraisals/part of objectives</li> </ul>

