So far, so good – and so what?

- ESD and the next decade

Prof Stephen Sterling
Centre for Sustainable Futures
Plymouth University, UK
Then...
Now...
Education for **unsustainable** development?

‘at present most of our universities are still leading the way in advancing the kind of thinking, teaching and research that…accelerates un-sustainability’
- Arjen Wals 2008, 31


'ESD promotes efforts to rethink educational programmes and systems that currently support unsustainable societies.’
our way of life is being threatened by a dark force.

we must defend our way of life.

WHAT IS THIS DARK FORCE WHICH THREATENS OUR WAY OF LIFE?

it's our way of life...
‘The shape of the global future rests with the reflexivity of human consciousness – the capacity to think critically about why we think what we do – and then to think and act differently.’

*World Lines, - Pathways, Pivots and the Global Future*, Tellus Institute
‘Global re-booting of HE’?

It will need ‘more than the alignment or scaling up of existing good practice. To transform the curricula and pedagogy at the core of their higher education experiences requires deeper innovation in staff development and across institutions.’

UNESCO GAP on ESD

The Global Action Programme on ESD (GAP) seeks to generate and scale up action in all levels and areas of education and learning to accelerate progress towards sustainable development.

Priority Action Areas include:

• Integrating sustainability practices into education and training environments (whole-institution approaches)

Cultural shift

‘HE institutions bear a profound moral responsibility to increase the awareness, knowledge, skills and values needed to create a just and sustainable future....

...why is HE so averse to risk and difficult to change? Because the change sought is a deep cultural shift....

- Anthony Cortese 2003

(Founder of Second Nature)

http://www.secondnature.org/about/
http://www.iaruni.org/sustainability/green-guide
EFS construction
‘Sustainability in higher education calls us to new sets of relationships – with our students, with each other, with what we learn, and with ourselves’.

- Bartlett, P and Chase, G (2014)
Tensions: *add-on or transformation?*

- Defined issue relating mainly to estates and resource use
- Principally an environmental issue
- Requires add-on, or reformative approach
- Involves a few key disciplines
- Is an additional agenda, easily accommodated
- Has clear goals, measurable

- Broad relevance to all aspects of HE operation and provision
- Also encompasses social relations, justice, ethics, economic viability etc
- Requires holistic and transformative approach
- Implications for most disciplinary areas and requires interdisciplinarity
- Is an overarching agenda and challenges existing policy and practice, involving organisational change
- Emerging and contested area
Sustainability at Plymouth University

- Sustainability one of four corporate strategic aims ‘Plymouth 2020’
- New Sustainability Strategy 2014
- Sustainability Executive; and Sustainability Advisory Group
- Sustainability Research Institute (ISSR) links over 300 academics
- Finance and Sustainability coordinates key policies
- Pedagogic Research Institute (PedRIO) has ESD specialism
- Sustainability education(ESD) in Teaching and Learning Strategy
- ISO 140001 and Fair Trade Status
- Commitment to Carbon Neutrality 2030
- Campus Information Control System (RGF project) – a sector first
- New Green Travel Plan and Sustainable Food Policy
- Three Green Gowns Awards in 2014
- Green League overall sector leader since 2007
- Ranked fifth place for overall sustainability performance by international Green Metric World University Ranking
- First university worldwide to win a Social Enterprise Mark.
- 49% of courses have an embedded or major sustainability element
- 50% of research funding is sustainability related and 25% of all publications
- Pool of committed and enthusiastic staff across academics, professionals, administrators and service providers in relation to sustainability
- Centre for Sustainable Futures (CSF) supporting the sustainability curriculum across all faculties
- UPSU wins Green Impact Gold Award in 2012 and 2013
Towards holistic change - the 4C model
Sustainability at Plymouth University

Sustainability Strategy is implemented through a 3 part approach and structure:

- **Curriculum** - CSF attached to PedRIO (pedagogic research institute) and Education Development team
- **Operations** - Office of Procurement and Sustainability (OPS)
- **Research** - Institute for Sustainable Solutions Research (ISSR)
Plymouth University Strategy 2012-2020

‘We aim to:

- differentiate our academic offer by ensuring issues and principles of sustainability permeate and inform our teaching and learning programmes, enabling students to engage positively with sustainability issues affecting their personal and professional lives in a rapidly changing world.’

- Ambition 4: Achieving Resilience, Sustainability and Effectiveness
Shifts with regard to curriculum and pedagogy

**FROM:**
- Curriculum as top-down ‘product’
- Fixed knowledge
- Disciplinarity
- Abstract knowledge
- Teaching/instruction
- Few learning styles
- Passive learning

**TOWARDS:**
- Curriculum as experience/situated learning
- Provisional knowledge
- Inter- and transdisciplinarity
- Real world knowledge
- Participative learning
- Multiple learning styles
- Reflective/active learning
CSF’s nine project areas supporting change

- Curriculum innovation, support and advice
- Student engagement
- Learning spaces and campus
- Resource development
- Communication and marketing
- Research
- Networking and facilitation
- Whole institutional change (including monitoring and evaluation)
- External impact, profile and observation
Stimulating new thinking
Making the business case

‘…assuring the future through developing resilience and adaptability in staff and students, through building coherence and synergies across all university operations, and ensuring our sector’s impact is beneficial at all levels.’
Informing stakeholders

SUSTAINABILITY REPORT
2014
Some issues

• ‘ESD’ as a bounded idea - and bounded community

• The limitations of ‘ESD’ term – and of others, and their effect on perception

• Emphasis on learning, OR addressing societal issues, OR both

• Levels of learning - and the possibility of higher education being deeper education

• Relating sustainability to other HE agendas and vice-versa

• The problems of organisational learning and full engagement
  • Lack of research – particularly longtidudinal
  • Balancing urgency with pragmatism – and respect
Support mechanisms and positive steps

- University sustainability strategy
- Sustainability explicit in all relevant sub-strategies
- Overall ESD curriculum lead
- Academic guidance or framework for ESD
- ESD curriculum audit
- ESD champions in departments and faculties
- Student engagement
- Inclusion of ESD in faculty policies and plans
- Active senior management commitment
- Funding and staff rewards
- Induction courses for staff and students
- Continuing professional development
- Resource provision
- Cross-university fora and communication
- Research change processes
- Capacity for continuous monitoring and strategic overview
A different kind of education?

‘That which is known is no longer stable. The shelf-life of knowledge can be very short.

In many disciplines what is taught and how it is taught are both stalked by the threat of obsolescence.

In a changing world, Europe’s graduates need the kind of education that enables them to engage articulately as committed, active, thinking, global citizens as well as economic actors in the ethical, sustainable development of our societies.’

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
Achievements and Prospects Conference
8th January 2015
Plymouth University

Hosted by the CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES and PedRIO