



Plymouth University receives award for the quality of its Sustainability Education

Plymouth University has recently received an award from the National Union of Students (NUS) for its Sustainability Education work. The NUS Responsible Futures scheme awards certification in recognition of whole institution approaches to sustainability education; where student learning can thrive in both the formal and informal curriculum. The Responsible Futures initiative has been guided by [research](#) undertaken by the NUS and the Higher Education Academy that shows that, nationally, 60% of students want to learn more about sustainability.

Through a partnership between the Centre for Sustainable Futures (CSF) within the University's Teaching and Learning Support, and the University of Plymouth Student Union (UPSU), Plymouth University was one of 13 UK institutions to take part in a Responsible Futures pilot audit in 2015. The audit involved CSF and UPSU colleagues submitting evidence against 40 sustainability education criteria, and in addition, the NUS conducted interviews and focus groups with both staff and students.

In awarding Plymouth full accreditation, the auditors praised the University for its whole-institutional approach to sustainability education stating:

It is incredibly clear that both the University and UPSU are truly committed to embedding Education for Sustainable Development within their core functions, which is enriching the experiences of students across the university.

In particular, the NUS commented on the key role that is played by the CSF in enabling this aspect of innovation and reform across the university, and how UPSU plays a vital role in the informal curriculum, enriching the student experience and championing this agenda.

The Responsible Futures audit observed that the University continues to be strong in the provision of formal sustainability education opportunities, such as the Masters in Learning for Sustainability course. It also noted that Plymouth is increasingly strong in the provision of informal curriculum opportunities through initiatives such as Plymouth Growing Futures, Global Challenge, and the Future Leaders Programme. In conclusion, the audit noted that knowledge and understanding around Responsible Futures issues appeared significantly higher than average amongst the Plymouth University students it consulted.

Upon receiving the Responsible Futures award, Paul Warwick from CSF, who helped lead the University's submission with Sarah Bowman and Sarah Davey from UPSU, said:

It is encouraging that this NUS audit has recognised the efforts of so many staff and students to create cutting edge sustainability education opportunities here in Plymouth. The audit has also helped highlight a number of key areas where we need to improve particularly with regard to communicating more effectively to current and prospective students the international reputation for sustainability education that the University currently enjoys.

Ruth Titmus, the current President of UPSU, is keen to build upon the findings of this audit and over the coming year pioneer initiatives to further advance the sustainability education we provide students in Plymouth, particularly around the themes of creating green spaces on campus and community engagement by students across the city. In so doing, this will help to continue the work of the previous President of UPSU, Sarah Bowman, who co-led the submission and recently stated:

At the start of the year I was actually dreading the sustainability part of my role, as I didn't really know much about the subject or even where to start. Responsible Futures helped give me a focus and gave specific things I could do to get involved and learn more about sustainability and what it actually means. It's now going to be one of the things I miss most about my position.

Professor Kevin Jones, Executive Dean for Science and Engineering and the University Executive Group Lead for Sustainability said:

Sustainability is very important to the University and, indeed, is hardwired into all aspects of our culture. It's good to see that this is externally visible in our offerings, and the effect it has on our students has been noticed. It's a continuing strength of the University involving all from students through to the Vice-Chancellor's Office, and this Responsible Futures certification will serve as one more indicator that our work is recognised by the broader community and we will continue to be a thought leader in all aspects of academic sustainability.

For more information about the University's sustainability education work please visit: <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/sustainability/sustainability-education>

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