

Australian Learning and Teaching Council

Turnaround Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly taking an active role in helping their nation to address key issues of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The *Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Turnaround Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education* project seeks to define the capabilities which make an educationally effective higher education leader for sustainability, and produce resources to develop and monitor these leadership capabilities.

Why are we doing this project?

Globally there has been a shift in focus towards Sustainability in Education. In 2007 the US passed the Higher Education Sustainability Act and, in 2008, put in place the University Sustainability Grants Program.

*“Change doesn’t happen
... it must be led.”*

The United Nations has declared the period 2005 to 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and the United Nations University is giving focus to actioning its agenda through the establishment of some 85 Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development around the world.

Both the Australian Government and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) are developing policies and programs to help the nation respond to the challenges of climate change. There is also strong support for ensuring that the nation’s future leaders are committed to an Australia which is both socially sustainable and stable. Australia has established a Green Skills Accord and a National Green Skills Implementation Plan. In March 2010, the Government held a national Sustainability in Higher Education Roundtable. Peak higher education bodies, including Universities Australia, have education for sustainability on their development agenda.

The HE Funding Council for England acknowledges in its 2008 Sustainable Development in Higher Education strategy that Universities must play a more decisive role in practising and promoting sustainability. In 2010 it funded a large project which links Education for Sustainability to quality assurance and enhancement processes. The Green League and the LIFE Index both acknowledge the role of HEIs in shaping graduate capabilities in this area.

The National Green Skills Agreement Implementation Group (GSAIG) has noted the critical importance of universities in ensuring that the graduates they produce across all professions and disciplines are committed to action in the area, that they understand the options and will support the development of green skills and sustainability initiatives in the enterprises and institutions in which they will become leaders.



However for this new role for universities to be consistently and successfully delivered it is essential that:

- A common framework for understanding how the various options for building Education for Sustainability (EfS) into the core activities of our universities is developed;
- How successful leaders of change have undertaken desired initiatives in the area with the active involvement of both staff and students and successfully implemented these initiatives is understood and widely disseminated;
- The leadership capabilities that count most for effective change in EfS are identified.



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What the project involves

In 2010 ALTC and UWS undertook a national stocktake of sustainability in the curriculum of all Australian universities and developed a framework which accommodated all that was uncovered. This current project aims to build on that by identifying exactly how successful leaders in the area make change work. Of particular interest is to identify the key, complementary roles and strategies used by the most effective senior and local leaders in this context.

The project builds on extensive leadership research already completed in the area for ALTC. Specifically, the project seeks to apply the proven leadership capability framework developed in the ALTC's *Learning Leaders in Times of Change* project and the effective change implementation research outlined in *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education* to the distinctive area of turnaround leadership for sustainability in our universities. It is an ill-defined area where Australia has an opportunity to lead the world.

This initiative represents a new direction for ALTC research and is an international model of cross-country collaboration in an area of core importance to each nation's future. This project meets the government's priority of ensuring that the many 'good ideas' being proposed for EfS in our higher education institutions actually get out into effective practice, scaled up and sustained.

How you could help us

Identifying effective leaders of EfS in our universities to participate in the project

The project team is looking to identify effective leaders of EfS in our universities to participate in the study. These leaders range from people who are PVCs (Sustainability), Executive Directors and Directors of Sustainability and Heads of School to those who lead courses at the local level along with L&T Directors directly involved in curriculum development and implementation.

Intended Outcomes

This project will produce a validated capability framework for leading sustainability innovations in higher education, resources to use this framework and insights into how effective current leadership selection, promotion, performance management and development processes for higher education sustainability leaders can be optimised.

Contact

If you would like to become involved in the project, would like to nominate an effective leader of EfS in our universities or would like to know more, please contact Helen Angelakis at UWS on (02) 9678 7255 or email: h.angelakis@uws.edu.au

Target Questions

1. What should be the key areas of focus in the work of senior and local university leaders of EfS?
2. How do successful leaders in this area judge that they are performing effectively?
3. What professional capabilities underpin effective practice in this role?
4. To what extent do the leadership capabilities identified in the earlier ALTC Learning Leaders in Times of Change research align with those for leaders of EfS?
5. To what extent are the roles, effectiveness indicators and capabilities identified common across countries and higher education systems?
6. What forms of professional learning and support are most or least productive for leaders of EfS in our colleges and universities?
7. What resources can be used to develop and enhance effective academic leadership in higher education?
8. What are the implications of this research for the recruitment, promotion, development and performance management systems for leaders of EfS in our universities?
9. In what ways can Australia learn and build upon best practice and experience internationally to leverage the application of the results?
10. How can university students and other stakeholders be most productively engaged in EfS initiatives?

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