Education for Sustainable Development

Introduction: What is Education for Sustainable Development?

UNESCO defines Education for Sustainable Development as ‘

‘Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) empowers people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future’.

There are a number of differing interpretations of a ‘sustainable future’ and ‘sustainable development’ albeit that many of these interpretations relate to finding a balance between economic growth, environmental protection and social wellbeing. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Higher Education Authority have tried to refine the definition of ESD as,

‘Education for sustainable development is the process of equipping students with the knowledge and understanding, skills and attributes needed to work and live in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations’

This definition is useful in the context of the education which UCL is seeking to deliver.

UCL & Education for Sustainable Development

UCL’s commitment to sustainable development runs throughout its teaching, research, enterprise and operational activities. This is echoed throughout its institutional strategies.

UCL2034 is UCL’s Institutional Strategy developed and published in 2014. It sets out a 20 year vision for UCL,

‘Our distinctive approach to research, education and innovation will further inspire our community of staff, students and partners to transform how the world is understood, how knowledge is created and shared and the way that global problems are solved’

The Strategy is underpinned by six principle themes and six key enablers. Sustainability and Education for Sustainable Development is implicit within the Strategy. Of particular relevance to UCL’s approach to Education for Sustainable Development are the principle themes: Integrating Research and Teaching; Addressing Global Challenges.

Under ‘Integrating research into education’, UCL is seeking to innovate and improve our research based educational provision to create a learning culture and curriculum structures that develop and foster critical independent thinking that is radical and disruptive, and contributes to problem solving.

Whilst ‘Addressing global challenges’ is about encouraging and enabling disruptive, creative thinking by our staff and our students that is catalytic and transformative and nurtures the development of radical new ideas and programmes for transformational impact on global problems. In doing so, UCL aims to ‘ensure that our problem-focused research and education are rooted in our ethical principles and commitment to generate and share knowledge for the benefit of humanity’.

These two principle themes are echoed and supported by the three key themes of the UCL Teaching Strategy (2016-21):

- Education through research and enquiry
- Education through participation
- Education through experience
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And finally, the UCL Sustainability Strategy sets out five core aims under which there is a series of targets and commitments. The third is specific to enhancing ESD:

*To provide the education, advancement, dissemination and application of sustainable development.*

**UCL’s framework approach to Education for Sustainable Development**

In 2013, UCL’s Vice Provost (Education) and the UCL Director, Sustainability took part in the Higher Education Authority’s (HEA) Green Academy (GA) Programme. UCL has sought to use the GA programme to help the development of Education for sustainable development across its formal and informal curricula.

UCL is in the process of mapping its ESD impact, the first part of which is being developed over the first term of the 2017/18 academic year.

Whilst there is much to highlight, UCL is seeking to baseline its ESD activity and identify ways to expand and develop. Once the baselining exercise is complete, a working group comprising members of the Sustainability Steering Group will review the data and prepare a report for the Office of the Vice Provost for Education (Professor Anthony Smith) setting out:

- The baseline of UCL’s ESD activities
- Support available to staff
- Opportunities for development

**Reporting on ESD:**

![Diagram](image)

**ESD Initiatives**

Key to a UCL education for sustainable development are initiatives such as the **Connected Curriculum**, the **Global Citizenship Programme** and **UCL Living Lab**.

**Connected Curriculum** aims to ensure that all UCL students are able to learn through participating in research and enquiry at all levels of their programme of study. The UCL Connected Curriculum is a way of framing and developing the future of education. There is a tradition in some disciplines of students participating in research and making strong connections between disciplines and with each other. The UCL Connected Curriculum is a chance to ensure all students have these opportunities. It’s also a chance to inspire education enhancement in all programmes.

**The Global Citizenship** programme is the UCL approach to preparing students to play an effective part in the global community. The Global Citizenship Programme connects students from across UCL to discuss problems like infectious diseases and rapid urbanisation. But it’s more than theory. The Programme also offers the chance to develop hands-on skills, from negotiation to presentation, photography and film-editing.

Programme strands include:
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- The Danube: A Voyage through the Heart of Europe (Cultural Understanding) - Explore the diverse cultures and languages of one of Europe’s greatest rivers
- (Un)Urban: Designing for the Green City (Human Wellbeing) - Work with organisations in East London to design a greener, healthier city
- Rise up! Negotiating urban change in Dar es Salaam (Sustainable Cities) - Using interactive simulation to understand the challenges and opportunities for urban change in Tanzania
- Health in Future Cities (Global Health) - Explore the relationship between the environment and the individual – and understand how our decisions impact global health and wellbeing
- Global Environmental Justice (Justice & Equality) - Examine climate change from the perspective of justice – and ask how we can make its effects less unevenly distributed
- Outbreak! Infectious Diseases and Global Citizenship (Global Health) - Understand how rapidly a local disease can become a global threat. Explore how individuals and organisations can combat it together

For further information see the Global Citizenship Programme website, GCP video and this case study.

UCL Living Lab is a programme initiated through the UCL Sustainability Strategy. It seeks to create the opportunity to use the university campus and operations as a focus for research or study. It works to unlock UCL’s expertise and tackle sustainability challenges by bringing people together and using the campus as a test bed for new ideas.

For further information see the living lab section of our website and our Living Lab case study: UCL Students undertake Post Occupancy Evaluation.

UCL support for ESD

UCL provides a number of tools to support is academic staff with the development of the UCL curriculum.

Teaching resources including toolkits are available online here.

UCL Arena is UCL’s professional development pathway for teaching: a scheme of awards accredited by the Higher Education Academy giving teaching and support staff nationally recognised fellowships.

In addition, UCL hosts a series of events and conferences, creating the space for dialogue, collaboration and participation on areas of teaching. Last year’s Connected Curriculum conference, focused on the following areas:

- What are our big ideas for research-based higher education in the 21st century?
- How can universities align both research and teaching to address global challenges?
- How can research-based education help universities impact public policy?
- How can research-based education allow universities to better address inequalities, including of race, gender, and indigenous people?

For further information see here.