

Royal  
Agricultural  
University  
Cirencester



**Sustainability in the Curriculum at the  
Royal Agricultural University:  
2016-17 Review**

**August 2017**



## **Sustainability in the Curriculum at the RAU: Our 2016-2021 Strategy**

In 2016, we set out a new '2016-21 Strategy for Sustainability in the Curriculum at the Royal Agricultural University'. This builds on our previous 'Environmental Action Plan 2014-16', and is underpinned by the aspiration that all of our graduates leave the RAU 'sustainability literate' and equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes to make a positive contribution to working and living in a world where sustainability is increasingly important. It encompasses, therefore, both teaching and learning *about*, and *for* sustainable development – and therefore underpins not only the content of what is taught, but also how students learn, and the skills they develop whilst at the RAU.

The '2016-2021 Strategy' sets out a number of targets and actions. Below we report on what actions we have taken against these in the last year (this should therefore should be read alongside the '2016-2021 Strategy' itself).

## **Sustainability in the Curriculum: The 2016-17 Year**

Annex 1 sets out, in more detail, progress against the specific targets and actions set out in the '2016-2021 Strategy' – however, some of the key highlights are summarised below:

- Our students have continued to engage in a range of projects as part of their courses to support their development as sustainability literate graduates:
  - Students on our FdSc Environmental Conservation and Heritage management, FdSc British Wildlife Conservation, and the One Year Farming Course, worked in partnership with staff from Gloucester City Council on a tree planting project as part of their programmes - developing vital skills in putting sustainability into practice – from sourcing funding, through to practical planting, and tree management. This type of project is designed to provide students with the opportunity to enhance their employability and sustainability literacy by working alongside employers – and it also made a practical difference to the environment – with the students planting 400 trees during the project.
  - We have continued our 'Living Lab' programme in which our RAU Sustainability Team works directly with academics to support students in engaging in 'real-life' projects based around the RAU's own sustainability management. For example, this year, the Sustainability Team worked with Entrepreneurship lecturers to devise a project for first year students on two modules. The students were tasked with researching, and then making a presentation, offering innovative solutions, which make practical business sense, to waste management issues on campus. First year students on the BSc (Hons) International Business Management programme also carried out a piece of coursework which required them to research the university's Environmental Management System and present their findings to the group. Our Sustainability Officer has also continued to work with dissertation project students, inputting real-life data and experience to their research.
- We built on last year's successful launch of the NUS Green Impact Scheme at the RAU, by for the first time this year, launching a set of Education for Sustainability (EfSD) criteria specifically aimed at academic staff. As well as incorporating training for academic staff on EfSD, this enabled staff to share good practice in EfSD and also encouraged them to think about how they can further develop their own practice in this area. As well as providing opportunities for the student team members and auditors to develop their skills, it also provided excellent opportunities for inter-disciplinary staff development as the team that

participated this year, who successfully gained a bronze level award, comprised staff from across the whole spectrum of academic departments and subject areas at the RAU, having decided to collaborate together as a pan-institution team rather than working in individual department groups.

- Following the 2016 introduction of a requirement to demonstrate, at programme validation and re-validation, how each course supports the development of sustainability literate graduates, we completed a review of the programmes that have been through the validation system since this requirement was introduced, and are currently reviewing the findings to inform our future staff development plans and ongoing EfSD strategy.
- We also carried out an institution-wide survey of our students which looked at their views on sustainability at the RAU, including their views on sustainability in the curriculum. 12% of the student body responded to the survey and there was strong support for integrating sustainability into the curriculum with only 8% of respondents disagreeing with the statement that “sustainable development is something which all university courses should actively incorporate and promote”. The students were also asked about what aspects of sustainability literacy they felt their courses had addressed so far. Of the group of students who responded (who were in all years of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes) they reported that their courses had helped them to develop a wide range of sustainability literacy skills to date, with the highest proportions being ‘planning for the long and short-term’ (68%), ‘understanding how human activity is affecting nature’ (67%) and ‘considering ethical issues linked to your subject’ (60%). The survey has given us valuable information about the skills and attributes which are being well supported in our courses, as well as those which we can develop in further depth – and this information is currently being reviewed to inform future staff-development plans and our ongoing EfSD strategy.

In our work this year we have continued to develop and support our aspiration that all of our graduates leave the RAU with a strong level of sustainability literacy, through the mechanism of sustainability being fully embedded throughout the curriculum across the whole institution. We will continue to further develop and make progress against our ‘2016-21 Strategy’ over the 2017-18 academic year – specific progress this year against our 2016-21 targets and actions can be found in Annex 1.

## Annex 1: 2016-17 Progress Against The 2016-2021 Strategy Targets and Actions

*2016-17 actions are shown in italics.*

Objective: To embed sustainability throughout the curriculum across each of the schools of study

### Targets:

- All RAU programmes to support the development of sustainability literate graduates by 2021.
- Encourage, support and provide opportunities for all academic staff to engage with, and develop their practice, in Education for Sustainable Development (EfSD) over the five year period to 2021.
- Continue to review and enhance our existing system of monitoring the impact of the RAU's EfSD activities on students, further testing our baseline data, and establishing, by 2019, a numerical target for increased student impact based on baseline data collected over the previous five years.
- Continue to encourage student engagement with our operational environmental management by maintaining our 'Green RAU' pages on the virtual learning environment, and supporting at least three RAU students per annum to do dissertation projects from the RAU 'Environmental Project Bank'.

### Actions:

- We will continue to ensure that all RAU programmes being validated and/or revalidated demonstrate how they are supporting the development of sustainability literate graduates, as appropriate to their subject. By the end of the five year validation cycle to 2021 all programmes will therefore demonstrate this.  
*2016-17: All programmes that went through the validation/re-validation system during this period were required to demonstrate how they supported the development of sustainability literate graduates.*
- We will monitor, annually, how programme teams have approached the incorporation of sustainability literacy into their programmes at validations / re-validations and will use this to share good practice, and inform future staff development.  
*2016-17: Review completed July 2017*
- We will continue to ensure that our RAU Academic Staff Development Programme incorporates EfSD, and will run at least two 'sharing and developing good practice' workshops on EfSD per annum over the five year period which will be open and advertised to all academic staff. We will also monitor staff engagement with these events.  
*2016-17: Staff training/workshops in EfSD offered to all academic staff in the 2016-17 year through the Green Impact scheme (17% of academic staff participated). Voluntary EfSD workshop, open and advertised to all academic staff, also run August 2017 (7% of academic staff participated). EfSD to be embedded into compulsory staff development workshops which all academic staff will be required to attend from September 2017.*
- We will continue to engage with external networks to share good practice, for example, EAUC and UNU RCE Severn.  
*2016-17: Sustainability Officer continues as south-west EAUC Convenor; Academic Lead continues as member of UNU RCE Severn Steering Group.*
- We will improve, by the end of 2016, the signposting to our EfSD support materials within our academic staff induction system.  
*2016-17: New compulsory staff training for new academic staff launching autumn 2017 and will incorporate EfSD training and support.*

- We will continue to maintain our 'Green RAU' pages on the virtual learning environment with up to date information about our environmental performance, and will support at least three RAU students per annum to do dissertation projects from the RAU 'Environmental Project Bank'.

*2016:17: 'Green RAU' pages continue to be maintained, and are used by students (see above information on coursework project undertaken by BSc (Hons) International Business Management students). Continued focus on 'Living Lab' projects – for example, waste management project detailed above. One student worked with Sustainability Officer on dissertation in 2016-17 year – increased focus will be placed on marketing this opportunity to all students in year 2017-18.*

- We will continue to collect data on students' dissertation choices and library borrowings on a biennial basis in order to monitor the impacts of our EfSD activities, and will also investigate, during the academic year 2016-17, other methods of assessing impact, for example, through student survey data. By 2019, having collected baseline data for five years, we will set a numerical target for future quantitative increases in student impact.

*2016-17: Dissertation choices and library borrowings data collected 2016 – due to be collected again 2018. New student survey incorporating EfSD questions conducted spring 2017 with results being used to inform staff development and ongoing EfSD strategy.*