

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CURRICULUM

In Brief...



The RAU Corporate Plan 2015-20 commits the RAU to ensuring that “sustainability is embedded throughout the curriculum across each of the schools of study”.

This brief guide provides an introduction to Education for Sustainable Development (EfSD) and how it relates to what we do at the Royal Agricultural University.

Sustainability is already embedded into much of the teaching and learning that goes on across the RAU, and therefore, this Brief Guide incorporates much of the good practice already happening. It aims to provide an introduction to EfSD for staff who may be new to it, as well as potentially providing new ideas to staff who have already embedded it into their teaching and learning activities.

Defining Sustainable Development

The UN Brundtland Commissions' definition is the most commonly used: “development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

This is often translated into ensuring that economic, environmental and social considerations are equally weighted in decision making.

It can also be looked at using other frameworks: such as the ‘Five Capitals Model’ which recognises that natural, social, and human, capital, as well as manufactured and financial capital, are critical in producing the goods and services needed to improve human life, and that any sustainable organization will be maintaining, or enhancing, stocks of all of these assets.

Why Is This Relevant to the RAU?

Sustainability issues are especially significant to the food production system, natural, and built environments in which our graduates will work and live. We pride ourselves on our high levels of graduate employability and on our focus on equipping our students with the skills and knowledge to have successful working lives in sectors where sustainability literacy is increasingly important.

Student surveys (nationally and at the RAU) show that students expect sustainability to be part of their programmes.

The wider higher education framework has, over recent years, placed an increasing emphasis on sustainability with EfSD guidance being published in 2014 jointly by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Higher Education Academy (HEA) to support the QAA's ‘Quality Code for Higher Education’.

Annual UK-wide surveys of students carried out by the HEA/NUS since 2010 have consistently reported that over two-thirds of students believe that sustainability should be incorporated into all university courses.



A 2013 HEA-funded survey of final year, and postgraduate, land management students at the RAU showed that demand is even higher here; with 98% of students considering it important that sustainability is incorporated into their courses.



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Teaching & Learning *About* and *For* Sustainable Development

EfSD comprises teaching and learning about the principles of sustainability (for example, things like sustainable soil management, energy efficiency, corporate social responsibility etc.) and also for supporting the development of skills to deliver sustainable development. At a simplistic level this means both teaching someone about why it is important that people turn lights off generally, as well as equipping them with the skills and motivation to personally turn the lights off when they leave a room i.e. teaching *about* and *for* sustainable development.

“There is nothing unique about a ‘sustainability literate’ graduate as opposed to a ‘good graduate’”
RAU Staff Member

The ‘Sustainability Literate RAU Graduate’ Model

This was developed by academic staff at the 2013 Staff Development Conference to identify how EfSD principles translate into what we aspire for in RAU Graduates to support their sustainability literacy and also their wider employability.

Developing the ‘Sustainability Literate’ RAU Graduate

There is significant guidance available on teaching and learning to support ‘sustainability literacy’ - see ‘Further Information’.

A variety of different approaches can be used including case studies of sustainability in practice; stimulus activities using things like newspaper articles as discussion prompts; projects and activities that simulate real-life (role plays, debates etc.); experiential project work (working together with stakeholders to solve a real-life problem); and problem-based learning where students aim to solve a real-world problem (perhaps involving a client).

The Sustainability Literate RAU Graduate ...

Knowledge & Understanding

Has sufficient **knowledge and understanding** to be able to solve problems and translate sustainability principles into practical applications



Further Information:
 Read ‘Sustainability in the Curriculum at the Royal Agricultural University: An Introductory Guide’ - available on the Gateway ‘Green RAU’ page, or the intranet Environmental Management pages.

Skills

Persuasive and able to **negotiate**

Able to be **creative**, and think laterally if necessary

Able to **communicate** ideas with confidence in a way that is appropriate to the audience

Able to **form their own opinions** and be confident in expressing them, taking a standpoint and leading where appropriate

Able to **reflect** on the consequences of decisions made and their impacts from a social, environmental and economic perspective

Able to **research** topics

Able to think **critically**

Able to take a **long-term systematic** and **holistic** view

Attributes

Moral and **ethical**

Open-minded and **empathetic**

Resilient, and able to deal with uncertainty showing **flexibility**

Considerate of the **environmental, economic and social impacts** of all their actions

Professional in their approach and **committed to lifelong learning**

