



Writtle University College Policy & Principles for Sustainable Development

P.R.Hobson & A. Perera

Preface

As a higher education institute with a specialist provision in land-based studies, Writtle University College embraces the fundamental principle of an effectively functioning and viable global ecosystem as the prerequisite to human existence and all its socio-economic assets. In line with the United Nations agenda and action under the banner, *“People, Planet and Prosperity”*, the institute adopts the position of social and economic sustainability based on societal respect for healthy and resilient natural ecosystems. The headline, *“Working with the grain of nature”* is viewed as a fitting motto to represent the endeavours of the institute that tasks itself with ensuring that environmental considerations are embedded in all student learning experience, and in the wider activities of the University College.

The only effective way to safeguard biodiversity and human well-being across scales is to ensure all economic activities are fully embedded in wider environmental systems (Figure 1). The design, planning and management of a sustainable economy will naturally operate to limited and renewable resources, and within the carrying capacity of the ecosystem. Strategies for sustainability also require individuals and societies to act with accountability, responsibility and future-orientated concerns for the forth-coming generations. These principles are based on the understanding that economic models working in isolation and decoupled from socio-environmental concerns will fail to achieve targets for human well-being and will ultimately diminish the capacity of the earth’s system to function effectively.

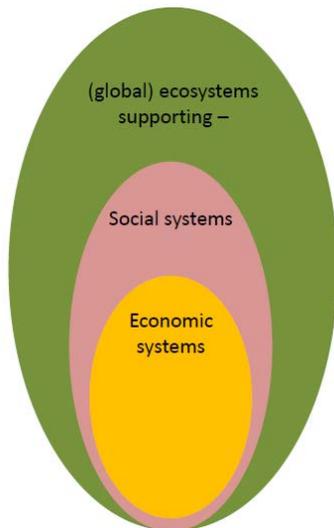


Figure 1 environmental and socio-economic sustainability model

Modern-day socio-economic systems are complex in the way they are organised and operate, and in many ways are decoupled from natural ecosystems. The findings of the UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, published in 2005, followed by Stern's report of 2006, recognised many of the failings and socio-environmental problems of existing economic models, and have called for change.

Sustainable development is the only current plausible model for achieving a fully integrated and resilient lifestyle for the long-term. Defined by the carrying capacity of nature's capital and the ethics of an accountable and responsible society, sustainability encourages the development of brave new innovative solutions and practices for securing life on earth, and for promoting social endeavour. An essential baseline to sustainable development is education and community participation. It is the ambition and commitment of Writtle University College to incentivise staff and students to develop principles and practices that promote and export sustainability in all its forms to the wider community, and in so doing, contribute significantly to the long-term well-being of the planet and its people.

The following principles are the result of several participatory workshops involving staff and students in the School for Sustainable Environments and Design. They are divided in to two parts: a framework / guiding principles for the institute; and strategic-based / operational directives

I Headline principles

Writtle University College acknowledges its responsibility and ethical duty towards its students, staff, partners, and the wider community, to promote learning and knowledge transfer in aspects of sustainable development in order to secure a better world for all. To achieve this aim it will pursue the following strategies:

- Designing, planning & management for the long-term as a basis for governing all our activities.
- Prudent, careful and wise use of natural resources to ensure their long-term persistence and renewal.
- Nurturing a caring society that promotes justice and equity without prejudice.
- Open dialogue and knowledge sharing between staff and students and with wider society to secure sustainable objectives in all aspects of life.

Framework: “*working with the grain of nature*”

- The strategies for management of landscape and natural capital assets are a matter of collective societal choices (staff and students)
- All strategies and practices in sustainable management of landscapes and natural resources should consider principles of ecosystems approach, which provides a framework for looking at whole ecosystems in decision making, and is part of the UK guidance for policy and decision makers on using an ecosystems approach and valuing ecosystem services.
- Management should, where appropriate, be decentralized and engage fully with the wider community of staff and students
- The WUC sustainability development strategy should seek the appropriate balance between safeguarding the environment & ecosystem function with socio-economic needs
- The sustainable development strategy must operate within the limits of functioning ecosystems, and continue to reduce unsustainable levels and scales of dependency on non-renewable energy, water and natural resources
- Management of energy, materials and natural resources must be guided by targets to reduce wastage, pollution and carbon emission

Operational objectives and goals

The following operational objectives and goals are designed to be delivered and achieved within four primary areas of activity.

1. Sustainability in curriculum development, delivery, and in research

The duty of the institute is to provide a comprehensive and inspiring learning experience for students and other trainees who have a desire and wish to contribute to sustainable development in their professional and social lives. To help learners achieve their aspirations we aim to deliver a unique and outstanding learning experience, which integrates into the curricula appropriate aspects of sustainability.

The same principle applies to research where the emphasis is on applied, problem-solving investigative enquiry.

The aims will be met by implementing the following actions:

- To continue with the development of transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary modules and lecture sessions on aspects of sustainability.

- To incorporate principles and concepts of sustainability across all study programmes in both HE and FE divisions with strong reference to both national and international research and policy frameworks.
- To cultivate a wider scholarly environment of knowledge sharing and experiences in sustainable science and practice through formal and informal discussion groups and colloquia..
- To encourage students to structure their own learning experience and extra-curricula activities that will contribute in a positive way towards the institute's objectives and strategy for sustainable development.
- To secure the future viability of academic provision and research at Writtle University College by responding appropriately to sector needs that have binding commitments to sustainable development.
- To promote a distinctive brand of research in the field of sustainability through partnerships with other like-minded HE institutes, and through consultancy with sector organisations working on sustainability agendas.
- To foster a cross-department and transdisciplinary exchange in scholarly activities and research in the field of sustainability.

2. Environmental sustainability and sustainable development at Writtle University College

Writtle University College (WUC), together with almost all other UK HE institutes, is assessed for its environmental sustainability performance through the UK People & Planet's University League, which is the only comprehensive and independent league table of UK universities ranked by environmental and ethical performance. It is compiled annually by the UK's largest student campaigning network, People & Planet.

As part of its action plan to meet targets within the sustainability strategy, WUC sets out a number of goals, as follows:

- To optimise where possible, the importation and through-put of materials and energy with the aim of reducing the externalisation of environmental costs to other areas.
- To work towards greater efficiency in the use of resources and energy by improving building design and use; by more considered design and integration of green infrastructure; and by orchestrating behavioural change of all staff and students in the use of facilities
- To work towards much greater use of and reliance on renewable energies.
- to conserve water and implement an effective water management plan for the whole estate that includes water storage and flood mitigation strategies.
- To promote long-term soil conservation across both amenity and farmed landscapes.

- To demonstrate tangible gains in carbon management through a range of activities including carbon sequestration and storage initiatives, and reduced emissions.
- To engage all staff and students in the process of improving environmental sustainability.

3. Sustainability in social and professional life

Writtle University College is committed to widening participation in teaching and learning, and promotes British Values that expressly embraces all peoples, regardless of their gender, culture or background. Whilst the focus is on academic provision and learning experience, the welfare of staff and students is an essential element to securing the social sustainability objectives of the institute. This ultimate aim is achieved by:

- Promoting self-reflection and evaluation as well as leadership skills amongst both staff and students with the focus on developing professional competency skills.
- Developing a culture of critical thinking and collegial mentoring
- Engaging students in the organisation and delivery of provision across all aspects of HE activities.

4. Communicating and documenting sustainable development within the institute

Writtle University College will establish an effective communication and documenting process to promote sustainability across the institute and to facilitate all activities in that direction. It will achieve this by taking the following measures:

- The formal documentation of incremental progress towards sustainability, which include online data bases and published reports.
- The establishment of a staff and student steering group designed to guide the institute through its policy and to develop the institute's conceptual framework for sustainability as well as shape new strategies.
- To share knowledge on sustainable development and action with institutional partners and to communicate activities to the wider community.
- To structure an effective induction programme for both new staff and students to ensure successful integration into the activities of the institute.
- To develop a student coaches network designed to widen student engagement in the programme and to reach out to students in neighbouring schools / FE colleges and other HE institutes.
- To establish a moodle site for sustainable development

II. Writtle University College's outreach policy to the public sector

The role of WUC as a learning experience provider extends to the engagement with the wider community, and in this context the institute has an obligation to promote sustainable development in society at all levels, from local to global.

- ***Promoting sustainable development by example***

Writtle University College has, for many decades, been a nationally and regionally important provider of education in land-based studies. As such, it has gained a national reputation for delivering excellence in various disciplines, and has also earned the respect of sector organisations both in the UK and from abroad. With its current standing in the public domain it has a duty and obligation to set good examples in sustainable practice. To meet this challenge, WUC must be seen to act according to its sustainability principles, and to be open and transparent in all its activities, especially in the management of its natural resources, and the treatment of its people and livestock. The following areas of activity are of primary concern and are the focus for action:

- Environmental stewardship of land and the sustainable management of natural resources across all utilised and non-utilised land.
- A fully collaborative partnership between students and staff to affect sustainable action across all aspects of life within the institute.
- Favouring of transactions and business partnerships with institutes, organisations and companies committed to sustainability.

2. Global perspective to local action

Writtle University College has a long history of attracting international students to many of its courses, and also of collaborating with other HE institutes and organisations overseas. More recently it has expanded its international activities in sustainable development through partnerships with other HE institutes and also through joint consultancy work with large international NGOs and government agencies. Students in conservation, horticulture and landscape architecture have benefited from these activities by engaging in a range of global case studies and also by working with new concepts and techniques developed specifically for an international audience by staff at the university. By growing this area of scholarly activities the aim of the University College is to ensure future graduates have the appropriate knowledge and skills to be able to carry forward in to industry and the wider community robust and innovative ideas for sustainable development.

Our on-going work with local and regional partners as well as international networks is an essential element of the institute's research capacity, and increasingly, it will become the means for promoting the institute's programme on sustainability.

III. “Collective responsibility”

Shaping the future for a sustainable lifestyle

Sustainable development is a global endeavour to safeguard the natural world and all the services it provides to secure human well-being for all. It requires collective responsibility and action, which, for most of us, has to be learnt before it can be acted on in ways that deliver tangible benefits. The process of learning about sustainability and sharing this knowledge is only possible if, in an organisation like ours, all stakeholders, that is staff, students and partners, engage with it. An essential element of engagement is to maintain an open dialogue and to invite all interested parties to contribute their views and ideas to help shape a more effective strategy for sustainability. Writtle University College invites its members and partners to participate in constructive debates and action to create an outstanding example of institutional sustainable development.