The Role of PhD Students in Driving Institutional ESD and Sustainability Research

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Student voice around sustainability becoming increasingly louder

Many sustainability active students at Keele

What about in relation to sustainability in the formal curriculum?

What is the role of PhD students?
The Keele ESD Approach

Director of Education for Sustainability

0.4 FTE Sustainability Project Officer
0.6 FTE Sustainability PhD Student

Sustainability Project Officers (SPOs)

Sustainability and ESD researchers

Contributing to advancement of sustainable development

Link between academics and student sustainability projects and the Students’ Union

Sustainability and ESD publications

Leaders/drivers of formal and informal ESD

Enhancing the sustainability research profile of Keele

PhD Topic: University Community Gardens for Sustainability and Urban Community Gardens: Reviewing, Comparing and Directing Research

PhD Topic: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Neoliberalism and Managerialism in English Higher Education: history, contradictions and synergies

PhD Topic: Women led, low cost, sustainable renewable energy technology (RET) projects in off-grid communities of the global south
SPO Sustainability Roles

- Events, Conferences, Workshops
- ‘Keele University’s Sustainability Research Network (KUSRN) – mailing list, wiki, events, seminar series
- Green Impact – 21 teams across university
- Sustainability Working Groups – sustainable transport, student engagement
- Mentor Student Sustainability Projects
- Working with Curriculum Development Team – incorporating sustainability into discipline-based ‘away-days’
- Environment and Sustainability Strategy
- Online Staff Sustainability Course
- Research Assistant Role

- Module Teaching - Greening Business: Employability and Sustainability, lectures to MSc Green Technology
- Staff Sustainability Survey – 600 responses
- ESD Development in Disciplines
- ESD Consultants for University
- Module Audits
- ESD in TLHEP – compulsory training for new lecturers
My PhD Research

Working Title
Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Neoliberalism and Managerialism in English Higher Education: history, contradictions and synergies

Aim of Doctoral Research
To explore the ideological and the practical relationship between Neoliberalism and New Public Management (NPM), and the Sustainable Development (SD) agenda of western Higher Education (HE), using the UK and specifically English universities as a case study.
The role and influence of HEFCE, HEA, QAA, NUS, EAUC on sustainability and ESD agenda

‘Steering’ and ‘nudging’ towards sustainability

The political framing of higher education in the UK, the knowledge economy, the ‘higher skills system’

Critical education and pedagogy

Higher education funding mechanisms, tuition fees, student consumers and employability

Transformative, paradigm changing, whole systems responses to sustainability – achievable?

Managerialist quality assurance agendas and sustainability education

Education for the public good within the neoliberal university – paradox or possibility?

The impact of quality-related research funding on sustainability and ESD research
Chosen Case Studies

Case Study Types
- English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- Higher Education Organisations/Bodies

Chosen Case Studies
- 8 HEIs - Russell Group; Research Led; Post 92; New
- HEFCE, HEA, QAA, EAUC, NUS + Key Informants

Research Design Method
- Case Studies/Cross-Sectional

Research Design Approach
- Interpretivist Epistemology
- Constructionist Ontology

Data Collection Methods
- Semi-Structured Interviews
- Documentary Analysis

52 interviews done – 4 to go!

Strategic and Corporate Plans, Sustainability and ESD Policies
Final Thoughts..

- PhD students driving and developing formal curricula and informal ESD
- Mutually reinforcing relationship between PhD research and work
- Range of experience and job roles
- Contributing to research and educational sides of university
- Driving sustainability at Keele
Thank You
Questions?

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