

## **Student engagement and reinforcing sustainability in HEIs**

Students live in a very open and creative environment and are often helpful in innovative processes with new ideas and lots of dedication. This session explores the role of the student as a driving force for higher education. How can student engagement be nourished and involved in decision-making processes for higher education?

Most universities have feedback systems where students can give feedback on their courses and programs, improving them for future students. Yesterday we talked more about several ways that students can engage with the university not only as sources of feedback, but as agents of change. An important aspect of this changed relationship is the level of trust given to students, combined with allocation of relevant resources.

This breakout session focused on how students can engage in sustainable development, both in and outside of our education, and the impact that we can have in our surrounding community. I'll start the summary with examples of students changing the education, then a bit about student organisations and finally I'll list a lot of ways that students can be inspired to engage in sustainable development.

We had three great presentations, and two were on how students can make sustainability courses more accessible for other students. The CEMUS project has students planning and organising evening courses and engaging relevant teachers in multidisciplinary environments. The ESE Project has students making inventory of both courses and student organisations with sustainability focus, and developing new courses with "community engaged learning". This means students can do for-credit projects combining academic research with community engagement in other organisations.

A relevant resource in this context is of course funding for part time employment of the engaged students. Another important resource to gather is a functional network of faculty and other leaders who are championing this sustainable development initiative, providing long term security, supporting the course development and sharing their expertise.

Now, outside of classrooms there are even more ways students can engage in sustainable development. It's quite common for students to form student organisations around sustainability, creating projects and taking action, from veggie at my place to divestment campaigns.

A good way for these organisations to develop is to exchange experiences and ideas through networking with others. Since student leaders tend to have their hands full already, a relevant resource in this context is a dedicated network organiser. Employed by the university, this person can be a contact with the university while both making sure there are meetings held regularly between the organisations, a pillar of support in the many transitions that occur when the students are replaced pretty much every year.

In fact, I would like to stress this part a bit more. Student leaders change a lot, and the difference between a good handover and a bad one can mean great deals in terms of progress. Knowledge and network is key, and the better your university can support students entering new roles and developing networks and leadership skills, the faster they can hit the ground running and start making a difference.

In the discussions we listed several other factors crucial for making student organisations sustainable in the long term:

- Clear roles and structure to recruit for and hand over
- Known expectations from others, maybe an event that is being held every year or you have other targets to be met or followed up.
- Sufficient funds and stable economy. If it's a student organisation the students may be volunteers, but it's hard to plan events or projects or to have teambuilding's without some consistent funds to use.

So, how can student engagement be nourished and involved in decision-making processes for higher education? Let me finish with some of the ideas from the discussions on how you can engage new students and nourish their engagement in sustainability, from exposure for the not yet engaged to the possibilities for the most passionate:

- Curricular:
  - sustainability content and projects in regular courses
  - elective courses, incl. evening courses
  - Interdisciplinary courses for broader perspectives
  - Experiential courses
  - Fieldtrips & Field work, visiting and solving problems with other organisations
- Outside of curriculum
  - Social events with sustainability: food, films, festivals,
  - Support clubs and networks, contact them and sign up to their newsletters
  - offer volunteering, or part time jobs
  - allow activism and support active student participation in policy making and curricular design

These were some of the ideas and examples from our breakout session, I'm really thankful to everyone who participated and shared all this experience and inspiration!

To have more students engage in sustainable development, they need to be exposed to it, both in and outside of class.

Social events,

processes, but rather focused on students in sustainability engagement.

We were told of successful student networking, where students can exchange ideas, socialise and develop projects such as "Veggie at my place" etc. However, student, leaders An important resource that the university provides in this place is a network coordinator

Some of the main challenges for working with students is the fast exchange of people.

In the presentations we had examples of how networks of students in sustainability organisations socialising and coming up with new ideas.

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students can be change agents at their university, feedback in courses and want more sustainability.

Expand the HEI impact in community and connection to other organisations.  
Students can be agents of change, when given resources.