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# What is non-tokenistic sustainability in a distance learning curriculum?

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## Abstract:

Defining non-tokenistic sustainability in a distance learning curriculum felt somewhat overwhelming. Curriculum design (CD) has many competing requirements, but it felt important to find a place for it, as there is increasing evidence that students are demanding stronger connections to sustainability and the climate crisis in university courses (THE, 2021, Unite group, 2021 and Carr-Shand, 2022). Key to our work is the idea that any actions should not be tokenistic but meaningful for colleagues and students who are engaging with our learning materials. Our awareness of tokenism was reinforced by students' responses to an internal 'Question of the Month' survey related to sustainability. As members of the Open University's (OU) Learning Design team, we are well-placed to support our academic colleagues and have developed a bank of resources (see appendix) to guide academics and production staff. We are now at a wider consultation stage, seeking feedback on further resources that would help embed and support sustainability in curricula. Since the OU signed the UN Global Compact in 2018 (The Ten principles: UN global compact, n.d.,), it has been working to connect with sustainable practices. Our vision was to create opportunities to inform colleagues about practical actions that they could take to connect with sustainability in design and production.

We have learned that not everyone is on the same page or as ready to engage with the concept of sustainability. Therefore, we have decided to pitch our initial work at provoking colleagues' curiosity, rather than attempting to have all the answers. The OU is the largest distance learning provider in the UK, supporting over 200,000 students, so our actions are likely to differ from those in traditional higher education environments. However, we can still learn from each other. In sharing the resources outlined here (see appendix) we aim to inspire conversations around engaging with sustainability within the curriculum. Sustainability is complex and bringing people on a journey towards a shared understanding of what it means to be sustainable within the context of a distance learning curriculum is equally complicated. Future scholarship will be focused on reflecting on that journey and considering how best to move forward to support our colleagues with practical advice about how to connect with sustainability.

## Keywords:



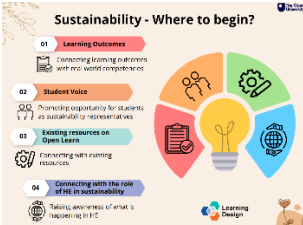

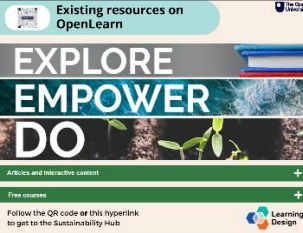
Sustainable development, sustainability, non-tokenistic, distance learning, curiosity, practical actions, learning design

## References

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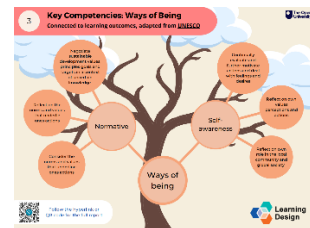
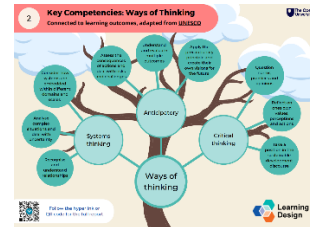
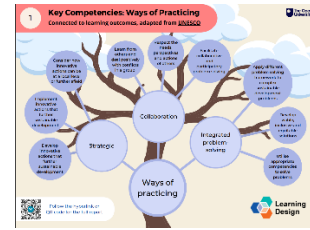
## Appendix

This overview explains the graphics we have created and how to use them. The resources in this appendix are the output of the first phase of our work in this area and help you to think about sustainability within module design and the curriculum. They have been designed so that a range of people can engage with them despite the stage they may be at when thinking about sustainability. If you would like access to a PDF version of the resources, please scan the QR code at the end of the appendix or follow the hyperlink that is just next to it (**Resource 8**).

<p><b>Resource 1</b></p> <p>A flow chart that helps you consider the possibility of embedding sustainability into module design and lets you know that there is support available from Learning Design if you wish to explore further.</p>	
<p><b>Resource 2</b></p> <p>A honeycomb design to provoke your curiosity and raise awareness of other sources of information within curated areas, such as pedagogical approaches and teaching methods, and ethical and social considerations. Links can be selected to explore that information further.</p>	
<p><b>Resource 3</b></p> <p>A resource that helps to narrow down some of the focus relating to sustainability areas that you could explore. This is not an exhaustive list of everything that sustainability means within curriculum design, but it provides a starting point to structure your thoughts.</p>	
<p><b>Resource 4</b></p> <p>This resource informs you of the executive summary 'Education for Sustainable Development Guidance' by QAA and Advance HE and provides a link to the paper. The summary has a framework that helps you to incorporate sustainability within your HE context and curricula.</p>	
<p><b>Resource 5</b></p> <p>This graphic informs you that there are existing resources on OpenLearn under the categories of 'explore', 'empower' and 'do'. Each of these categories contains articles, interactive content, and free courses for you to explore and consider whether link to them or re-use some of the content.</p>	

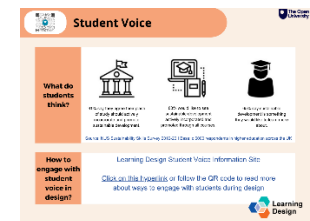
## Resource 6

These are a series of three graphics that represent the UNESCO competencies that can be connected to learning outcomes. The areas of focus are 'Ways of Practising' and 'Ways of Thinking' and 'Ways of Being' If you are considering how activities in your courses can connect to more sustainable ways, this can be a useful place to understand this. For example, if you have a collaborative activity, you could look at the resource 'Ways of Practising' and the learning outcomes that link to the key competency of collaboration and consider how to use in your context. After reflecting, you may want to explicitly connect to these competencies and learning outcomes or you may prefer to have activities related to them.



## Resource 7

This resource emphasises the importance of the student voice in design. At the OU, colleagues have various means to enable students to represent themselves in the design process. The Curriculum Design Student Panel is a prime example of this, and colleagues can explore how to use that panel with the information in this resource. The purpose of this is to consider how to use the student input most appropriately in relation to sustainable thinking. This could be connected to sustainable content, but also content within the material that relates directly to sustainability. It could be to do with the skills related to a task or the learning outcomes that you are using. All these things could be considered in different ways using the student panel process and involving students as sustainability representatives in the curriculum design.



## Resource 8

[This hyperlink will take you to a page that contains PDF version of the images above.](#)

You can also access them via the QR code on the right..

