

# Sustainability Factsheet

## Why do we need to talk about Sustainability?

- The world faces substantial, complex and interlinked development and lifestyle challenges and problems (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009a, p. 1).
- Many current practices can be destructive (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009a, p. 1).
- Education is fundamentally important to addressing the critical global challenges we all face (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009a, p. 2).

## What is Sustainability?

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43).

Since 1970, “the focus has shifted from knowledge of natural ecosystems and the threats posed to them by overuse & depletion of resources to **equipping all people with the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to make decisions based upon their full environmental, social, cultural and economic implications**” (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009b, p. 10).

Sustainability is respecting the planet and what it provides to us (e.g. resources, fauna, flora and habitat) and respecting all people.

We all make decisions based on comfort, convenience, our beliefs, others’ responses .... what we grew up with ...

Environmental considerations are not separate from social in how we make decisions yet include:

- Transport; energy (electricity); water; biodiversity (flora and fauna)
- other resources & packaging (conscious consumer) – paper, ink, computers, equipment, pollution (waste) Education is fundamentally important to addressing the critical global challenges we all face (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009a, p. 2).
- decisions about environment are always also based on social and economic considerations. For example, when we make decisions about transport, we may not even consider the environment at all! We may simply follow our cultural ways as our habits. We may consider the time it takes us, comfort, convenience, our family and other needs.

Social considerations include Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and cultural issues:

- well-being of staff and students – workplace health and safety, ethics
- diversity of staff and students; equity in recruitment, the workplace, promotion
- acceptance of all staff and students;
- alignment with ECU’s values, mission, vision and graduate attributes
- ECU Values: integrity, respect; ECU Mission: partnerships
- ECU Vision: ethical; inclusive and sustainable communities
- Graduate attributes: ability to work in teams, cross-cultural & international outlook

## Economic considerations include:

- short and long-term costs; environmental cost; social cost
- use and management of our assets (e.g. buildings) efficiently

## What impact do these concepts of sustainability have on ECU graduate attributes?

- **Graduate attributes:** ability to work in teams (see others' viewpoints), cross-cultural & international outlook, critical appraisal skills (decision-making not just knowledge), ability to generate ideas (solutions)

## Principles of Sustainability

- **Transformation and Change/Social reform:** not simply about providing information but involves equipping people with the skills, capacity and motivation to plan and manage change towards sustainability within an organisation, industry or community.
- **Learning for all:** Education and learning that includes people of all ages and backgrounds
- **Systems Thinking:** to equip people to understand connections between environmental, economic, social and political systems.
- **Envisioning a Better Future:** engages people in developing a shared vision for a sustainable future.
- **Critical Thinking and Reflection:** values the capacity of individuals and groups to reflect on personal experiences and world views and to challenge accepted ways of interpreting and engaging with the world.
- **Participation:** recognises participation as critical for engaging groups and individuals.
- **Partnerships for Change:** focuses on genuine partnerships to build networks and relationships and improve communication between different sectors of society. (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009b, p. 9)

## How does the notion of Sustainability fit my discipline, unit, course, workplace, home, leisure?

How could we all make decisions taking into account their environmental, social, economic and cultural implications?

### What does the notion of Sustainability do for us all and for our decisions?

- We reflect on how we live and work and how this impacts the environment, economy and others (social and cultural aspects) on local, regional, national and global levels.
- We devise viable solutions to complex problems rather than one and only one way of doing things.
- We consider the consequences (social, economic, cultural and environmental) of possible actions.
- We accept responsibility for creating a sustainable future.

### What does Sustainability ask about how we all live and work?

- Where did this product come from? How much packaging does it use? Biodegradable? Toxic?
- Was it made and disposed of in a way that cares for the environment?
- Was it made in a way that cared for the people who made it?
- Was it transported a long way?

- Do I really need it?
- What is the impact of ... on the environment? Does it reduce the water, energy, resource used?
- What is the impact of .... on the wellness of other people? All types of people? Here? Now? In the future?
- What is the cost? Now? Later?
- Is there a better way?

What are some issues that could be addressed by Sustainability principles?

**Sustainable luxury?** Sustainable buildings? **Sustainable design?** Sustainable cars?  
**Sustainable transport?** Planning for sustainability? **Sustainable population?** Sustainable fashion? **Sustainable food production?**

## References

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