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UK Universities are Raising their Game says Environmental and Social Responsibility Report

Launched this month, the second Annual Report from Universities that Count (UTC) - the benchmarking and performance improvement scheme for higher education - spotlights significant progress over the last year in environmental management and social responsibility within UK universities. The sector improved its overall score by 8 percentage points, and the results tables are being made public for the first time this year.

53 universities with over 150,000 employees and nearly one million students were involved in the scheme (along with the Higher Education Funding Council for England - HEFCE), which was led by the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) in partnership with Business in the Community and CSR Consultancy Ltd.

The University of Bradford topped this year's university table, achieving the Gold UTC Standard, along with second placed Nottingham Trent University. The Russell Group did well, with Silver awards going to the University of Edinburgh and the University of Warwick. The universities of Aberdeen, Exeter, Plymouth and Sunderland also were awarded Silver. HEFCE – one of the funders of the programme – completed the survey and achieved the Gold Standard.

In the shorter Environment Index, the University of Dundee and the University of Hertfordshire achieved Silver awards. Full results tables are in the accompanying Summary Report.

Iain Patton, Chief Executive of the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges said; “I am pleased to see that during the last year, the sector has continued to demonstrate progress in sustainability and social responsibility, improving its overall performance and increasing the sector's average score from 67% to 75% in the Environmental and Social Responsibility (ESR) Index of the programme. This indicates a real commitment from the sector to drive forward improvements in environmental management, sustainable development and social responsibility. The more focussed Environment Index saw an increase on last years average from 62% to 70%. Universities and colleges have the potential to make a significant impact on the environmental challenges facing modern society. We continue to improve campus performance, meeting the aims of delivering sustainable, low carbon 21st Century campuses but it is through the sector's primary functions of education, research and skills training that institutions will truly meet their social responsibilities.”

51% of participating universities completed the optional 'Teaching, Learning and Research' Impact area of Universities that Count. The Universities of Bradford, Gloucestershire, Plymouth, St. Andrews and the University of the West of England were the top 5 achievers, revealed earlier this year in the Times Higher to celebrate their achievements.

Andy Norris, Business Continuity Manager at the University of Westminster added; “The Universities That Count programme has helped to embed sustainability issues at the university and promoted co-operation between academic and corporate services colleagues. The common aim is to ensure that every student who attends the University of Westminster and every employee will be engaged and energised by our sustainability agenda.”

This year's Annual Report demonstrates that as the focus for so many diverse communities, universities are increasingly engaged in sustainable development. The most progressive are adopting new initiatives and embedding sustainability into core business and management practices as well as developing holistic, institution-wide approaches to environmental and social responsibility. Inevitably however this Report also demonstrates that there is still much to do.

Peter Hopkinson, Director of Education for Sustainable Development (Ecovercity) and Emma Griffiths, Ecovercity Programme Support Officer at the University of Bradford said; “Universities that Count has meant that we could be even more resourceful and by using the Environmental and Social Responsibility Index as a management tool we could bring people, materials and processes together. We believe we have moved from a phase characterised as ‘whole institutional change’ where structures, processes and methods were being developed to one that we describe as ‘normalising’ where sustainability is the norm rather than the add on.”

The Universities that Count programme is based on Business in the Community's authoritative Corporate Responsibility (CR) Index. Through participation in the programme institutions are able to measure, manage and report on their positive contribution to sustainable development, to gauge performance improvement and share information.

Participating institutions each received individual feedback reports giving them detailed analysis on the four ‘pillars’ of responsibility – Community, Environment, Marketplace (students and suppliers) and Workplace (employee) issues. These enabled them to compare their scores with those of their peers as well as the business community.

Alison M Wild, Pro Vice Chancellor (Administration) & University Secretary Liverpool John Moores University and Chair of The Association of Heads of University Administration adds; “The Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA) has been engaged with the Universities that Count (UTC) initiative and is pleased to support its overall aims and objectives. As Registrars and Chief Operating Officers responsible for a wide range of professional support services, AHUA members have a uniquely holistic view of operations within their organisations. Consequently, they are ideally placed to oversee the various elements and workloads which contribute to the effective implementation of sustainability issues. The AHUA looks forward to continued engagement with the UTC scheme and to supporting further development in the future.”

Dr Alan Lovell, Professor of Sustainable Business University of Glamorgan commented on the programme; “Two aspects of UTC stand out. Firstly, it is a sincere approach to understanding what universities are actually doing regarding sustainable development on their campuses and across their curricula. Secondly it provides a framework for moving a university forward in terms of its strategic intent regarding ‘sustainability’ and all that this entails.”

Universities that Count engages with a wide range of HE sector organisations such as the Association of University Procurement Officers, Universities HR, the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, the Association of Heads of University Administrators, the Association of University Directors of Estates as well as all four UK funding councils. UTC has proved it can be a powerful tool for change for many institutions. Indeed the programme's intention is to help to create a step-change in the way universities respond to environmental and social issues.

The partners behind UTC are delighted to see institutions gaining value from their participation and would like to take this opportunity to join them in celebrating areas of strength as we announce the first year of public disclosure for the programme. Next year we hope every university in the UK will stand up and be counted and will soon be calling for entries to the Year Three scheme.

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Notes to the editor

Public Disclosure

The full public disclosure table is available in the attached Summary Report and can be replicated for publishing in the press. Please note when publishing the results table that of 54 UTC participants, 45 elected to have their results published this year.

Full Annual Report

The full Annual Report can be found on the EAUC website at www.eauc.org.uk/utc

About Universities that Count

- Universities that Count is a partnership between the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC), Business in the Community and CSR Consultancy. It is part funded by the four UK HE Funding Councils.