

There is no denying it; the further and higher education sector is facing tough times. Government efficiency savings are high on current agendas, so where does this leave environmental improvement?

## Where Scotland commits, the world will follow



In Scotland, the devolved government has set challenging targets for action against climate change to ensure the move towards a sustainable future continues, and further and higher education institutions have a key part to play in this. In 2009, the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) launched the *Universities and Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland* (UCCCFs), supported by the Scottish Government and funded by the Scottish Funding Council, to provide a platform to address climate challenges at an institutional level and to work towards a low carbon economy.

Following its launch, the UCCCFs gathered momentum until, at the end of October 2011, the last institution made its commitment, resulting in a 100 per cent sign-up from all Scottish institutions. The success of the Commitment is a huge achievement for the Scottish sector in moving the sustainability agenda forward. However, the hard work doesn't stop there. Institutions have one year from the date of signing to produce a five-year Climate Change Action Plan, with specific targets to outline their planned activity. Detailing specific targets has ensured a robust model for achieving a change in performance, whether the motivation is financial or environmental.

So could this model, which has proved so successful in Scotland, be used as a motivator for the rest of the UK to commit to sustainability? The UCCCFs has been carefully designed to work harmoniously with other EAUC activity. Through agenda setting new programmes, such as the just launched *Learning in Future Environments* (LiFE) Index, and the soon to be launched *Sustainability Exchange*, the EAUC is inspiring the whole UK further and higher education sector and provid-

ing the strategic framework for all universities and colleges to work towards becoming truly sustainable.

The Scottish Commitment also acts as a blueprint that can be used not just nationally, but also internationally to develop the sustainability agenda worldwide. The EAUC's sister organisation in North America, the Association of the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education

● **To find out more about the UCCCFs, LiFE, the Sustainability Exchange and all of the other exciting and inspiring work the EAUC is carrying out, please visit: [www.eauc.org.uk](http://www.eauc.org.uk)**

(AASHE), work with a consultancy called Second Nature to support a similar model. Meanwhile, the EAUC has been working closely with its Australasian counterpart, Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS), to help develop a Commitment that is suitable for them.

In order to focus the sector, the EAUC is working to expand the scope and guidance for the

UCCCFs to become more aligned with its wider activity. Many still see sustainability as an area for only estates/facilities departments to address. However, to make sure meaningful change is achieved and that the associated benefits are reaped, it is essential that institutions adopt a holistic interdisciplinary approach to sustainable development. This is about integrating sustainability into all aspects of university life and embedding the values without them being 'bolted on'. This can easily be transposed to education for sustainable development (ESD), which also includes skills based education and research.

The UCCCFs was born from a carbon-focused approach for institutions to pull their existing activity together. However, the drivers from external pressures of efficiency savings and where the sector now finds itself has evolved massively since 2009, and moved far beyond just tackling carbon. As a result, the EAUC plans to further develop the Commitment and, through the LiFE Index, take its principles beyond Scotland to ensure the learning can be replicated both nationally and internationally. ●



The successful UCCCFs Scotland Conference gave institutions new ideas for reducing their carbon footprint.

