

Changing the World: ten years of Sustainable Development graduates



(Above) Staff of the School of Geography & Sustainable Development 2017.

Climate change, energy use, social justice, declining biodiversity, natural resource depletion – the Sustainable Development (SD) degree programmes at St Andrews have never been afraid to tackle the big issues that affect our world. Ten years ago the first graduating cohort of SD students went through the School's doors. Here we celebrate the achievements of a decade of staff and students working at the forefront of global change.

In 2005 the UN decreed that the following ten years would be a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development; shortly thereafter, the University of St Andrews set up its first truly interdisciplinary undergraduate degree in Sustainable Development. Eleven Schools, from Geography & Geosciences to Divinity, came together to create programmes that were groundbreaking, not just here but globally – only a handful of universities worldwide then offered undergraduate SD degrees.

The unique feature of our SD programme has always been the core interdisciplinary modules. The overall goal is to enable students to critically interrogate the principles, practice and plurality of sustainable development in order to contribute to the evolution of innovative, interdisciplinary thinking and action in this area. Flexible degree pathways include options that focus on climate change, environmental management, business and corporate social responsibility, sustainable technologies, social justice, international development, policy and implementation, and knowledge and education for sustainability.

Being student- and interest-led is also a cornerstone of SD studies – learning is tailored to each student and their individual situation.

From the beginning, SD courses have had a truly international appeal, drawing students from all over the world from Canada to Malaysia, Sierra Leone to Germany. Bringing these cultures together to explore different perspectives on SD and the world is a key characteristic of the programme.

“ We in the School of Geography & Sustainable Development take great pride in knowing that this generation of SD students will continue to pursue their aspirations to make the world a better place and to contribute practically to ensuring that this happens”

Dr Rehema White, early SD Director



Michael Palin Hon DSc

Michael Palin has said that, “Geography is the subject which holds the key to our future”, encapsulating his belief in the power of an integrative geographic vision to address today's pressing environmental issues. Professor William Austin, Head of the School of Geography & Sustainable Development, was delighted to present the laureation address for Michael Palin during the June graduations in 2017 (see page 7). The honorary degree was given to him “in recognition of his major contribution to the public understanding of contemporary geographical issues and his notable service to the development of the discipline of geography in UK secondary and tertiary education (and a bit of writing and acting along the way)”.

One common question is ‘What do SD graduates do?’ We invited eight of our Sustainable Development graduates to share their experiences. They speak of working with businesses, governments and the third sector, including small specialist charities and global NGOs. SD graduates from St Andrews have been truly global in their work to support a healthy and more equal society living within environmental limits.

Emilia Skrzypek MA 2008 (SD), MRes 2009 (Social Anthropology), PhD 2015 (Social Anthropology)

“The SD degree programme opened my eyes to new ways of thinking and working through issues related to resources and development, and its interdisciplinary and applied nature provided great foundations for my career. After graduation, I did an MRes and then a PhD in Social Anthropology. I have worked for a well-known, international NGO and in the Scottish Government's Strategic Analysis team. I have taught on Social Anthropology and Sustainable Development programmes – always a fantastic experience!

As a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Fellow, I currently work on a research project co-hosted by the University of St Andrews and the University of Queensland, aimed at developing a new model for more responsible and sustainable resource relations in Papua New Guinea.”

Farwa Tassaduq MSc 2012

“The interdisciplinary approach of the SD degree prepared me well for my work in Pakistan, where I have been working for an NGO that supports adults with special needs to live and work together sustainably, and developing individual capacities of underprivileged children by keeping them in touch with their natural environment. My thesis on media and environmental behaviours gave me an opportunity to take part in a project with George Washington University, making films about water issues being faced by women in my city and presenting these findings in meetings held in Kyrgyzstan, India and the USA.

Now my work is based on the opportunities sustainable development can provide to ensure gender equality, social justice and interfaith harmony in Pakistan.”

James Martin MA 2008

“The SD course sparked my interest in how environmental behaviours can be nurtured through government policy and how businesses can improve environmental performance to excel in their market. The variety in classes prepared me well for working across a range of environmental projects, and I have worked with the Scottish government, public agencies and all 32 Scottish Local Authorities to develop policies and services that improve waste behaviours.

As a circular economy consultant, have witnessed a real evolution of behaviour in businesses; I support SMEs across Scotland to utilise circular economy business models, maximising the value in materials to bring new goods to market and gain a competitive edge in their industry, and I am now supporting the design of Scotland's first national deposit return scheme.”





Jamie Adam
MA 2008

"After graduating I was recruited by Community Energy Scotland, applying cutting-edge environmental technologies to help create local energy economies where renewable generation is matched with local demand. I have project-managed the building of several large-scale windfarms, one of them the first to be developed by a housing association. I am also proud to have been involved with the construction of several off-grid community networks that integrate small wind, solar and battery storage, which have helped to bring reliable 24-hour power to Scotland's remote island communities. The SD programme made me realise that working with communities and renewable energy was exactly what I wanted to do and it gave me the skill-set to achieve that."



Lissa Eng
MA 2010

"Studying SD at St Andrews led me to a deeper understanding of what it means to care for the planet, and the people who live on it. For the past four years I have been working in Washington DC as a public affairs specialist at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency within the US Department of Interior. Although I work in DC, my job gives me opportunities to visit public lands across the country, which the BLM manages for the benefit of current and future generations.

I love that in my work I am able to see sustainability in action and the intersection of social, environmental and economic issues in real life – which makes public lands stewardship challenging, but rewarding."



Rebecca Petford
MA 2010

"Inspired by my SD classes and the dynamic university community, while at St Andrews I co-founded two ongoing sustainability projects – Transition UStA and St AndRe-Use. Eight years later I still do similar sustainability project work, but on a much bigger scale. I now manage the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges' Scotland Programme, funded by the Scottish Funding Council to embed environmental and social sustainability into governance and operational, teaching and engagement activities within Scotland's 45 universities and colleges.

I love doing sustainability projects – every day is different, it is so satisfying to see your ideas take shape, and working with stakeholders from all sectors in an ever-changing field like sustainability means the learning never stops."



Ezekiel (Zik) Conteh
MSc 2012

"After graduating I joined Christian Aid to deliver major water, health, climate change and governance projects across West Africa. This included managing a project to deliver water supplies and renewable energy to remote communities in Sierra Leone. I also worked on tax justice and natural resource governance campaigns across West Africa, increasing public access to social services.

My most challenging moment was in 2014 – the Ebola outbreak. As part of Christian Aid's response team, I worked to help break the chain of virus transmission in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Over 11,000 people died from the virus but our collaborative efforts helped curtail the spread and eventually save lives."



Jonathan Cooper
BSc 2008

"I was among the first cohort of SD students who graduated in 2008, and my time studying at St Andrews on this interdisciplinary degree programme motivated me to pursue further study, undertaking doctoral research in energy studies followed by postdoctoral research.

In 2014 I moved to the idyllic rural setting of Harper Adams University in Shropshire where I am now Senior Lecturer in Sustainable Technology and Geography. I teach students on a range of sustainability-related programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and research sustainable technology, primarily on-farm energy generation."

Commemorative tree planting



On Sunday 15 April, as part of this year's Alumni Festival Weekend, the School of Geography & Sustainable Development, in collaboration with Transition University of St Andrews, invited staff, students and alumni to mark the tenth anniversary of

the first cohort of Sustainable Development students graduating at St Andrews by planting trees. The timing to coincide with the Alumni Festival Weekend was particularly apt as the tree planting was funded from a bequest in memory of alumnus Jeremy Tucker. The tree planting complements work being undertaken to improve biodiversity across the University, which aims to enhance St Andrews as a desirable place for staff and students to live, work and study whilst providing a valuable teaching resource that will benefit future students and staff. As Alistair Macleod of Transition University of St Andrews explained, "The tree planting is the first stage of managing the woodland areas around the Observatory with biodiversity and access as a focus, whilst considering the importance of other site users, including those using the sports fields and staff. The University of St Andrews is a world leader in sustainability studies and endeavours to demonstrate this in practice by creating a sustainable, wildlife friendly environment within its estates." www.st-andrews.ac.uk/gsd www.transitionsta.org