

## **New JNCHEs Sustainability Issues Working Group**

# **Values relating to sustainability of HE institutions**

1. There is much common ground shared by employer and trade union members of the Sustainability Issues Working Group on the values relating to sustainability in HE. Members of the working group have explored the extent of shared values and see the ten values outlined below as underpinning the sustainability of institutions. Sustainability is important in establishing confidence among all stakeholders, including students, research commissioners and staff. It is also central to the build up of expertise among staff and institutional reputation. Successful sustainability depends upon innovation and responsiveness to developments in knowledge, technology and other factors and the effective management of the institution's resources.

### **A. Overall mission of HE**

2. The 1997 report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Lord Dearing, recognised HE as central to creating a society in the UK committed to learning throughout life. The report saw HE activity as both life enriching – desirable in its own right for individuals – and as fundamental to achieving improved quality of life within society more generally. The report argued higher education should sustain a learning society with four main purposes:
  - to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment
  - to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application to the benefit of the economy and society
  - to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy at local, regional and national levels
  - to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society.
3. The working group believes the vision outlined by the Dearing report has stood the test of time as an overarching statement of the sector's mission. It recognises, however, that the ways in which institutions seek to deliver that mission evolve over time and need to take account of a range of factors.

## **B. Values contributing to sustainability of HE institutions**

### **Value 1: Autonomy and good governance**

A long-standing and important characteristic of the HE sector in the UK is that institutions are autonomous bodies, each making its own decisions on its mission and how to fulfil it. Institutions can only achieve their mission if they aim for the highest standards of management and for the inclusion and engagement of staff, at appropriate levels within institutional governance. They should have due regard to the principles of transparency and openness.

### **Value 2: High-quality education**

HE institutions provide for the advanced education of students, making available the best of current knowledge, ideas and understanding. Ensuring all HE students can benefit from a high-quality teaching and learning experience is central to the sector's mission. The quality of student experience is influenced by the quality of resources to support their learning, pastoral care, and scope for personal development. The encouragement of students' independent and critical thinking and their active engagement in their learning are essential components of their education.

### **Value 3: Research excellence**

Excellence in research is the second major stream of HE activity and a core value of the sector. Excellence relates not only to the way research is conducted and the quality of results, but also to the processes through which findings are disseminated.

### **Value 4: Academic freedom**

As an essential part of their mission to develop knowledge, ideas and understanding, HEIs provide and protect the principles of academic freedom.

### **Value 5: Access**

There are powerful social, economic and moral arguments for widening access to HE, making advanced education available to those able to benefit from it without inappropriate limits.

### **Value 6: Fair and equal treatment**

Fair and equal treatment is a central value for HEIs in their dealings with their students, staff and others. Clear processes and procedures, transparency in decision making, and giving those concerned the chance to make their views known and have them properly considered are all part of achieving such treatment.

### **Value 7: Responsible employment practices**

Institutions work to achieve high standards of employment practice for their staff, paying due regard to issues that are of concern to staff, for example fair levels of reward and job security. In line with the overall mission of HE, institutions seek to foster appropriate staff development.

### **Value 8: Contributing to the wider society**

HEIs can achieve their purposes only through constant interaction with the surrounding society and contributing to it. They make an essential contribution via their students going out into the world to use and apply their learning, through the dissemination of research and its application, and through taking part in wider debates. As well as

meeting the national priorities for which they receive funding, HEIs also play an important economic and community role in the locations where they operate.

**Value 9: Taking an international perspective**

An international perspective is an essential value for HEIs. They form part of an international community dedicated to the advancement of knowledge. Drawing on and contributing to knowledge across the world, attracting and bringing together academics and students from every society, HEIs have an important role to play in increasing international engagement and fostering global links and understanding.

**Value 10: Environmental sustainability**

HEIs will want to play an active role in fostering improved environmental sustainability, both through their teaching and research activities and through the example they set in their own day-to-day operations.

This statement is the concluding piece of work of the Sustainability Issues Working Group. Other outputs from the Working Group are:

- An Insider's Guide to Finance and Accounting in Higher Education (January 2011)
- The Financial Health and Sustainability of the HE Sector (January 2011).
- Workforce Planning and Organisational Change: Case Studies of Practice in Higher Education Institutions (September 2011).

These publications can be accessed on the UCEA website at:

[www.ucea.ac.uk/en/New\\_JNCHES/new-jnches-working-groups/reports-from-the-workinggroups.cfm](http://www.ucea.ac.uk/en/New_JNCHES/new-jnches-working-groups/reports-from-the-workinggroups.cfm)

New JNCHES publications are also available from HE trade unions:

[www.eis.org.uk](http://www.eis.org.uk)

[www.gmb.org.uk](http://www.gmb.org.uk)

[www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk)

[www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

[www.unitetheunion.org](http://www.unitetheunion.org)