

Responsible Futures Overview 2016-17

1.0 Introduction

Responsible Futures is a whole-institution approach to embedding social responsibility and sustainability across the formal and informal curriculum across both HE and FE. It is a **supported change programme and accreditation mark** that works to put sustainability at the heart of education.

Responsible Futures is a framework to assist you in creating an enabling environment for staff and students to work together to embed social responsibility and sustainability into teaching and learning. It seeks to legitimise and mainstream education for sustainable development, ultimately helping to ensure students leave education with the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to lead society to a more just and sustainable future.

The framework facilitates a close working partnership between students' unions and their institutions through a set of criteria drawn from good practice across the sector. NUS works with partnerships to personalise their approach by selecting the criteria that suit them, including developing some of their own criteria. Partnerships take part as a limited-size cohort which share resources and learn together as they proceed through the accreditation, convened and supported by NUS. When they are ready (typically after 1-3 years), partnerships are audited by a team of trained students, trained by NUS, resulting in an externally-verified audit report. Accreditations are awarded annually and remain valid for two years.

Responsible Futures is an accreditation of the start of, and progression along, a journey of embedding social responsibility and sustainability into the educational purpose of an institution, rather than an end point.

The programme was piloted in 2014-15 and fully launched in summer 2015. To date, 21 FE and HE partnerships have either achieved or are working towards accreditation.

For more information, see www.nus.org.uk/responsiblefutures.



"A great experience for all involved, it has been incredible to take part in this, and I am very proud of the University & the Students Union at UWE."

- Responsible Futures Student

Auditor at the University of the West of England (UWE), March 2016

2.0 Outcomes

To date, over 500 actions have been taken by *Responsible Futures* partnerships through the programme. The outcomes of these actions include:



Reflecting back one year on from gaining accreditation, the first cohort said that the value in achieving the *Responsible Futures* accreditation had been:

- Securing credibility – internally and externally
- Developing a reputation for excellence
- Enabling access to funding
- Developing new working links within the university / college
- Creating better partnerships between the institution and students' union
- Enabling engagement of staff, at multiple levels and roles, in embedding sustainability
- Securing incorporation of ESD into strategy

"Building stronger links with others across the university, and a commitment to joint students' union / university working."

"Credibility for the work, and an objective basis for saying we are doing this well and therefore should be funded to continue to do so."

"It showed senior management that what we were doing was well regarded and that gave the VC / DVC / PVC confidence to build sustainability education into the core of the new university strategy."

On the programme overall, partnerships have reported that *Responsible Futures* has driven new activity; benchmarked progress and facilitated reflection; developed new, strong working relationships across the institution; engaged and empowered staff to take action.

For more reflections from participants, please see the quotes in Appendix 1.

We are happy to connect you up to individuals involved in the programme so you can ask them about Responsible Futures directly.

3.0 Criteria

The *Responsible Futures* criteria were developed in collaboration with the 2014-15 pilot partnerships¹, representing FE and HE institutions and students' unions across the UK as well as the advisory board comprised of various sector organisations including People and Planet, the Association of Colleges, EAUC, EAUC-Scotland, Learning for Sustainability Scotland, Society for the Environment, Higher Education Academy, Knowledge Transfer Network, a selection of academics, and our Sustainability Direction and Oversight Board.

The actions recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach are ineffective and therefore are designed to be customisable and flexible to recognise different priorities and circumstances. The programme provides an effective framework and useful road map for partnerships to assess and benchmark their work, guide and shape their future efforts, and recognise their existing accomplishments.

There are 45 criteria, of which 10 are mandatory, 32 are optional, and 3 are self-defined, giving the partnership the opportunity to highlight and celebrate unique areas of their work. To achieve the accreditation mark, the Partnership must complete the mandatory criteria and meet or exceed the score threshold of 200 points, out of the maximum 300 points, not including the three self-defined criteria.

The criteria cover eight key themes:

- Baselines and benchmarks
- Partnership and planning
- Leadership and strategy
- Policy and commitment
- Interventions
- Impacts and outcomes
- Outreach
- Self-defined criteria

An overview of the 2016-17 criteria can be found in Appendix 2.

¹ The University of Bristol, Coventry University, the University of Chester, Dumfries and Galloway College, Edinburgh University, Keele University, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Plymouth, Sheffield College, South Lanarkshire College, South Thames College, SRUC (Scotland's Rural College), University of Worcester.

4.0 Costs of participation 2016/17

	Responsible Futures 2016/17 first year membership fee (excluding audit)	Responsible Futures 2016/17 subsequent year membership fee (excluding audit)	Responsible Futures 2016/17 Audit Fee	Responsible Futures 2016/17 post-accreditation annual membership fee (incl. all future audits and support)
Higher Education Institutions	£2,250 +VAT	£1,250 +VAT	£750 +VAT	£500 +VAT
Further Education Institutions	£1,500 +VAT	£750 +VAT	£500 +VAT	£100 +VAT

Note: We recommend that the fee is paid by the university or college, and not by the students' union/association.

- Partnerships will need to be re-audited every two years to retain the accreditation from the date of receiving the accreditation.
- Local pairings of a college and a university or regional groupings of institutions can contact NUS to discuss a shared reduced fee (contact details at end of document).
- A limited number of sponsored places are available for Scottish Colleges through EAUC-Scotland. Please get in touch to discuss further.

Included in the costs:

- Access to online workbook of criteria which provide an institution with an ambitious, clear, and comprehensive framework to build capacity and enhance learning and teaching;
- Support and guidance at every stage, including one full-day bespoke support visit per institution;
- Being part of a national cohort, with regular email contact, website updates, and monthly telephone catch-ups;
- Two regional cohort support days per year;
- Access to a bespoke resource bank of good practice on embedding sustainability and social responsibility in the curriculum;
- Opportunity to share and showcase achievements and national publicity through case studies on the *Responsible Futures* website;
- Personalised feedback reports for your institution;
- Unlimited remote support.

Not included in the costs:

- Travel for minimum two representatives from each institution to attend up to two regional support day(s) and a national end-of-year celebratory event;
- Venue, catering, and travel costs for student auditor training;

- Local awards events (if you choose to run one) to give out certificates to student auditors and celebrate local successes.

5.0 Prerequisites of participation

- A desire to develop a whole-institution approach to embedding sustainability and social responsibility across the curriculum;
- A commitment to allow adequate staff time to lead on *Responsible Futures* within both the students' union and the institution;
- A willingness to work through a close collaborative partnership between the students' union and the institution;
- A commitment to promote and support the monitoring and evaluation of the project;
- A senior champion within both the students' union and the institution;
- A commitment to send two representatives from each institution to attend up to two regional support day(s) and a national end-of-year celebratory event;
- A willingness to actively engage with and support other members of the cohort.

6.0 Sign-up form

Partnerships can sign up to *Responsible Futures*, as well as all other NUS sustainability programmes, through the NUS Sustainability Engagement Programme electronic sign-up form, available [here](#).

More information can also be found in the 2016/17 rate card, available to download [here](#).

- Please note, should we be oversubscribed, we will award places in the 2016/17 cohort on a first come first serve basis.
- Please note we can invoice part, or all, upfront this financial year (by end of July 2016). Just request your preference on sign-up form under the 'Payment' section so we can send you an invoice in mid-June.
- Our default invoicing arrangements are: 30% of costs upfront in Sept 2016, 30% in Dec 2016, and the remaining 40% in May 2017.
- If you want to pay as one instalment instead (Sept 2016), please request this on the online sign-up form.
- Once you have returned the form, we will email you a cost summary, payment schedule and contract, which you will need to sign, scan and email back to us.

7.0 Any questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:

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Learn more on the website:

www.nus.org.uk/rf

And explore the example online workbook:

www.greenimpact.org.uk/responsiblefutures

Email: examplerf@nus.org.uk

Password: example

Appendix 1: Cohort Feedback

Benchmarking and reflecting, internally

"Really useful, like holding up a mirror, taking the time to reflect and see where you are at." **University**

"With any process, it's a great way of setting a benchmark of good practice and then for us to follow and frame that benchmark, in terms of what you operationally deliver. Gives you an aspiration, which you then try and deliver." **College**

"It's reminded us of things that had dropped off the agenda or been put in the 'too difficult' box and it's made us get them out of the 'too difficult' box." **University**

Driving new activity

"Focus has broadened out as a result of RF - shifted between looking primarily at environmental and now starting to look at social and economic (procurement) aspects." **University**

"Help us see where we can improve. Hadn't done the student survey before. Will now be doing the student survey every year. Look to make improvements." **University**

Expanding the scope and context of existing work

"There are projects that would have happened anyway but the criteria outlined by Responsible Futures enabled us to take our work a step further. It made us think about our work in a different context and highlighted our areas for improvement." **University**

"[It was an] opportunity to improve...get people involved...provide validity and improve the profile [of the university]" **University**

Engaging and empowering

"A major benefit of participating in Responsible Futures has been getting buy in from Senior Management and from the whole University. We've seen each other on equal footing through this project." **Students' Union**

"It's given us (the SU) a seat and a legitimacy to sit and talk about the curriculum; not a lot of FE unions have this." **Students' Union**

Partnership development

"We would have had an environmental and sustainability agenda into the future anyway. What it's done it put that into a bigger external context and corporate context. It's enabled us to see ways to use it to link across to other aspects within the university." **University**

"It has been beneficial because it's made them set up the wider steering group to drive ESD." **University**

Fun!

It's been great fun, actually! **University**

Appendix 2: 2016/17 criteria

The following is a summary of the 2015/16 Responsible Futures criteria. The ten mandatory criteria have their criteria codes underlined. Please note that minor adjustments and updates may be made before publishing the 2016/17 criteria.

Baselines & Benchmarks

BB001) Within the last three years, the Partnership (the students' union and institution working together) has completed an institution-wide **survey of students** on their attitudes towards, and expectations on, social responsibility and sustainability (SRS), and published the findings.

BB002) The Partnership has completed a follow-up to the survey conducted in BB001 and published the findings.

BB003) The Partnership has carried out a thorough **baseline curriculum review or audit** on SRS and published the findings.

BB004) The Partnership has completed a follow-up curriculum review or audit on SRS and published the findings.

BB005) The Partnership routinely asks students about SRS in **evaluation surveys**.

BB006) Within the last three years, the Partnership has completed a **survey of teaching staff** on their understanding of SRS, and published the findings.

BB007) The Partnership has completed a follow-up survey to the survey conducted in BB006 and published the findings.

Partnership & Planning

PPL001) The Partnership has a working or **coordinating group** that formally leads on efforts to attain, or retain, Responsible Futures.

PPL002) The Partnership has an active **SMART action plan** relating to the issues related to Responsible Futures.

PPL003) Within the current academic year, the Partnership has proactively engaged **key stakeholder groups** in the issues related to Responsible Futures.

Leadership & Strategy

LS001) The Partnership has gained the support of a **high-level champion** within both the students' union and institution for their efforts to attain Responsible Futures.

LS002) The Partnership has gained the support of their **trustees and/or governors** within both the students' union and institution on the issues related to Responsible Futures and their efforts to achieve accreditation.

LS003) The Partnership has developed a **statement on SRS** through a consultative process that defines what it means to the institution in relation to its educational purpose and values.

LS004) The institution's overall **strategic plan, and/or the publically-stated learning, learner or graduate outcomes, skills or attributes, or core learning outcomes** include supportive references to the issues related to Responsible Futures.

LS005) The institution's **learning and teaching strategy**, academic strategy, or equivalent, includes supportive references to the issues related to Responsible Futures, or it will do after the next review.

LS006) The Partnership has embedded the issues related to Responsible Futures into the institution's **sustainability strategy** (or equivalent).

LS007) SRS is embedded in the **internal communication strategies** for both the institution and the students' union, and/or the Partnership has successfully reached good numbers of staff and students across the institution with proactive communications relating to the issues related to Responsible Futures.

Policy & Commitment

POC001) The institution has provided **professional development** on the issues related to Responsible Futures for relevant personnel.

POC002) The **students' union** has formally passed and publicised a **policy commitment** to embedding SRS in the formal and informal curriculum.

POC003) One or more named **elected student officer** has agreed to lead on SRS issues for the students' union this academic year.

POC004) The Partnership has made **sufficient staff or student resource** available to substantively progress the issues related to Responsible Futures.

POC005) The Partnership has made effective use of the **relevant quality framework** and/or **outcome agreements** to progress the issues related to Responsible Futures.

POC006) The Partnership has embedded the issues related to Responsible Futures into their **human resource processes**.

POC007) The Partnership has embedded the issues related to Responsible Futures into their **induction processes** for all types of new starter (students, staff, governors, etc.).

POC008) The Partnership has worked with the institution's **student recruitment and/or widening participation** department(s) to incorporate issues relating to SRS into their work.

Interventions

IN001) Within the current academic year, the Partnership has run one or more **internal event** bringing together staff and students on the issues related to Responsible Futures.

IN002) Within the last five years, the Partnership has taken part in, or is booked onto, an **external change programme** on the issues related to Responsible Futures.

IN003) Within the current academic year, the institution has made **funding, or related resources**, available to staff and students so that they can develop their own projects that support the aims of Responsible Futures.

IN004) During the last 12 months, three or more schools / depts have done one or more of the following in relation to SRS: **discussion-based and participatory learning; problem based learning; simulation activities; and/or debates** on issues related to Responsible Futures.

IN005) The institution's **estates team** routinely collaborate with learning and teaching staff to create educational opportunities through their SRS-related work.

IN006) Within the current academic year, the Partnership has actively made use of **student coursework and/or dissertations** to support one or more of the other criteria in this workbook, or has made firm plans for next academic year.

IN007) The Partnership actively facilitates structured **interdisciplinary experiences**, linked to the issues related to Responsible Futures, through the formal curriculum.

IN008) There are good levels of **informal curriculum activity** that is supportive of the aims of Responsible Futures.

IN009) The Partnership has conducted an **in-depth analysis** of a specific intervention listed above.

Impacts & Outcomes

IO001) The Partnership has reflected on and identified demonstrable positive progress in relation to embedding SRS across the **formal curriculum**.

IO002) The Partnership has reflected on and identified demonstrable positive progress in relation to its **institution-wide collaborative approach**.

IO003) The Partnership has reflected on and identified their **short-term impacts and outcomes in relation to positive outcomes for students**.

IO004) The Partnership has reflected on and identified their **long-term impacts and outcomes in relation to positive outcomes for students**.

Outreach

OU001) The Partnership has embedded the issues related to Responsible Futures into their **community outreach activities**.

OU002) Within the current academic year the Partnership has **proactively engaged one or more students' union or educational institution** on the issues related to Responsible Futures.

OU003) Within the last three years, the Partnership has **presented** on their work relating to the Responsible Futures agenda at a sector event.

OU004) The Partnership has **published case studies** promoting SRS-related achievements, impacts and outcomes.

Self-Defined Criteria

SD001-SD003) *Self-defined by the partnership to highlight unique local initiatives and achievements.*

