



Embedding ethical and sustainable employability in tertiary education: best practice examples

Key findings

A pan-Wales HE project

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1 Executive summary

This report is the culmination of a task and finish group designated from the Medr and Advance HE Community of Practice (CoP) for Employability. For the academic year 2024-25 the CoP prioritised two key areas through task and complete groups, one of which was Ethical and Sustainable Employability (ESE). As global priorities shift towards sustainability and social responsibility, tertiary education must equip graduates with the skills to thrive in a purpose-driven job market. As such, the ESE group was tasked with reviewing the critical role universities play in shaping ethically conscious and sustainable career paths for students. Included in this, the group were tasked with exploring best practices in integrating sustainability into curricula, fostering responsible career development and partnering with industries that share these values.

The project ran between March and mid-June 2025 and used a case study/best practice data gathering approach via email and word of mouth. Each project member sent the template to various contacts within their own institutions and to selected external stakeholders. Examples were analysed using thematic analysis.

In total, 49 case studies were collated from institutions in Wales. The report identifies the contribution of these to ethical and sustainable employability and evaluates the initiatives, including key benefits and areas for improvement or future action and key insights. The report finds that through curriculum innovation, extra-curricular initiatives and employer engagement, educators are forging connections between employability, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and, in Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). At the same time, the report identifies ongoing challenges, especially in relation to financial constraints and workload pressures. Key recommendations focus on the development of a toolkit, collaboration and communication, and future projects.

Key findings

- + In total, 49 case studies were collated from institutions in Wales. The sustainable and ethical employability examples ranged from 1) teaching and learning activities, courses and resources, 2) student projects, 3) assessment methods, 4) staff training and support, 5) student feedback, 6) student support, 7) events, 8) employability resources, 9) competitions, 10) awards, qualifications and funding, 11) policies, 12) networks and forums.
- + Seminar, lecture and workshop content were the most common initiatives reported. Assessment was another theme identified, with a distinct focus on innovative methods and the development of graduate attributes such as group work, problem solving, written communication skills and application of practical and real-world problems within relevant industry settings. Student projects also featured heavily as important methods to enhance sustainable and ethical employability.
- + Staff training and support were found to be essential contributors to ethical and sustainable employability. Student feedback was also critical in providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the taught content of their degree programmes in relation to sustainability, ethics and climate action, while contributing feedback for curriculum development. Support was also offered through teaching initiatives, student societies, events and competitions. Careers service-led, employability-specific resources and initiatives were also found to contribute specifically to ethical and sustainable employability.
- + Policies were identified as important for sustainable and ethical employability. These provide staff, students and external organisations with clarity in relation to careers and employability, and evidence alignment with ethical and sustainable values. Awards and qualifications further contribute, providing an additional motivation to engage with ethical and sustainable employability initiatives.
- + The themes identified highlight significant activity across the sector in advancing ethical and sustainable approaches to employability. Institutions are increasingly embedding values-led practice into careers education, student development and employer engagement. This shift reflects a growing recognition that graduate success must be understood not only in economic terms, but also through the lens of social responsibility, equity and long-term impact. The development of skills and graduate attributes was a dominant theme for all the initiatives. For example, stakeholders referred to the following skills as being developed: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, data analytics, ethical decision-making, group work, innovation, reflection, digital skills, practical skills and systems thinking.
- + Enhancing knowledge and understanding of various stakeholders such as children, students, staff, communities and industry was a key pursuit towards ethical and

sustainable employability. Part of this process involved introducing core topics, such as ethics, sustainability and climate action, and frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Well-being of Future Generations Act, Education for Sustainable Development, UNESCO Competencies, Inner Development Goals, Ways of Working and The Five Pillars of Sustainable Development (people, prosperity, peace, partnership and planet).

- + The application of sustainability and ethics knowledge to practical and real-world contexts was an essential component of many initiatives. This was achieved, for example, through taught content, assessment, case studies, industry and group projects, events, hackathons, games, student societies, guest speakers and training courses. Real-world applicability and appreciation of the relevance of sustainable and ethical employment allowed for an opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on their individual impact and how this contributes more broadly to society. This impact can be realised through ethical employment and green careers.
- + The ethical and sustainable employability initiatives were evaluated using different methods – for example, various types of feedback, initiative engagement metrics, initiative outcomes and institutional performance indicators. The most common benefit to be reported is the development of knowledge, understanding and skills related to ethical and sustainable employability. Engagement and awareness of sustainability and ethics related topics was the second most common benefit to be identified. This included opportunities for stakeholder engagement and marketing specifically. Ethical and sustainable employability benefits included enhanced employer awareness, student employability, paid work opportunities and real-world application of knowledge to industry settings.
- + An invaluable benefit identified for many initiatives was staff and student empowerment, support and recognition. Another key benefit was the collective impact at an individual and institutional level. This was referred to through performance indicators such as graduate outcomes, but a more valuable indicator is the collective impact of educating a generation of responsible and ethical leaders of the future. Additional benefits include funding opportunities for staff, students and institutions to support ethical and sustainable employability – for example, via staff support and upskilling, student ventures, institutional networks and projects. These contribute towards enhancing the reputation of the institution.
- + In the context of accelerating global challenges, from climate change to technological disruption, the need for responsive, future-oriented employability initiatives is more pressing than ever. The activities showcased in this report represent a strong foundation, yet as the sector navigates rapid change, they also speak of a clear opportunity to strengthen impact through deeper collaboration, wider inclusion and more intentional alignment with global sustainability goals.

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