Environmental Communications Plan for the University of Glasgow

1. Introduction

Despite the University of Glasgow (UoG) making significant efforts in recent years to prioritise environmental sustainability, the common perception of the University's environmental stance remains low. This is exemplified by the People and Planet 2016 Green League, in which the University of Glasgow was ranked 129th in the UK[1].

In 2016, UoG created a Sustainability Strategy, Action Plan and a Sustainability Governance Board to map out the implementation of environmental sustainability throughout the institution. This Communications Plan has been created in accordance with point 2.3.1 in the Sustainability Action Plan and should be read alongside these other documents in order to establish a comprehensive vision of UoG as an environmentally sustainable institution.

Current environmental policy and action at UoG is somewhat fragmented and even cases of best practice are too often invisible to the public. This document aims to address these issues by proposing communications activities aimed at:
- Improving the connectivity of existing work.
- Demonstrating the commitment of UoG to environmental action and increasing transparency about current policy and improvements.

Given the current prominence and increasing urgency of climate change, due emphasis must be given to the environmental performance of the estate (whilst not neglecting other dimensions), identifying means of promoting and inspiring environmentally sustainable action in harmony with the overall brand of the University, of 'inspiring people' and producing and welcoming 'world changers'.

UoG is an influential institution both regionally and globally. It plays an important role in shaping the values and identities of its students and staff; therefore it is imperative that UoG strives - and is seen to strive - to demonstrate and make visible its prioritisation of environmental sustainability, not least because this is likely to influence how students and staff perceive environmental issues[2]. In order to be motivated to make necessary behavioural changes, individuals need to know that influential institutions such as UoG are doing the same[3], and more besides. This Plan proposes application of the ISM tool that acknowledges individual, social and material factors must be aligned in order to create

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[1] People and Planet, (2016), [Accessed 7 Feb 2017]. https://peopleandplanet.org/university-league; Like most similar 'league tables' for various aspects of university 'performance', the Green League methodology is not beyond criticism. It is notable that the best-performing universities are dominated by newer universities housed in modern buildings, with many older universities which have estates dominated by historical buildings, which are challenging to operate to modern standards of insulation etc. Nevertheless, some comparable universities (e.g. Newcastle, Leeds, Bristol, UCL and Oxford) sit far higher in the tables than Glasgow. Clearly, there is plenty of scope for improvement.

[2] Too, L.; Bajracharya, B., 2015. Sustainable campus: engaging the community in sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education.* Vol 16. Issue 1.

[3] Lorezoni, I., Nicholson-Cole, S., Whitmarsh, L., 2007, Barriers perceived to engaging with climate change among the UK public and their policy implications, *Global Environmental Change,* Vol 17, pp. 445-459.

lasting change.[4] The UoG has the capacity to influence social and material conditions to create opportunities for change.

Improving the way environmentally-conscious and beneficial actions are communicated will have a positive impact on the way the UoG is perceived internally, and by prospective students, key stakeholders and external bodies. Effective communication has the potential to improve the positioning of UoG in environmental league tables. For example, 50% of the university's 'score' in the Green League is determined by information found on the University's website. It will crucially also make a key contribution to 'living the values' of the UoG, as well as making evident the earnest engagement of UoG in wider initiatives in pursuit of environmental sustainability.

2. Vision

Implementation of this Environmental Communications Strategy for UoG seeks to deliver clear and coherent communication of the full diversity of environmental actions of the University of Glasgow, on all its campuses and in all of its activities. The communication activities will showcase progress against pre-agreed objectives and highlight the commitment and contributions of staff and students involved with environmental issues, thus encouraging others to increase their own involvement.

Adoption of value-based communication principles to ensure public communications produced by UoG encourage the continuing commitment of staff and students in addressing long-term and 'bigger-than-self issues', of which climate change is a particularly urgent example[5].

An institution that is transparent about its environmental performance and impact, clearly communicating areas needing improvement and the plans for progress.

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[4] Darnton, A., and Evans, D., 2013, Influencing Behaviours: A Technical Guide to the ISM Tool, (The Scottish Government: 2013) [Accessed 5 March 2017] < http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0042/00423531.pdf> ; See Appendix B.
[5] Crompton,T., 2010, Common Cause: The Case for Working with our Cultural Values. WWF UK. It is noteworthy that a similar framework has been adopted by the Sustainability initiative of Glasgow School of Art, see: http://www.gsasustainability.org.uk/thinking/challenges-connections

3. Principles

3.1. Visibility

We will ensure that:

- The institutional commitment to environmental sustainability is clearly visible in all relevant University communications.
  - o Dedicate a webpage to environmental sustainability that will be easily accessible from the front page of the University website, including information on the UoG current carbon emissions, sustainability strategy, responsible investment activities and campus redevelopment. This will provide links to environmental initiatives at UoG, such as relevant academic research, the Glasgow University Environmental Sustainability Team (GUEST), relevant opportunities (such as funding or job opportunities) and relevant student societies (SRC Environmental Officer, Glasgow University Climate Action, Glasgow University Food Cooperative, etc).
  - o Include a page dedicated to environmental policies and progress in the University of Glasgow prospectus to inform prospective students and encourage engagement with these issues.
- Values of environmental sustainability are evident from the moment of first contact by prospective students, and then again as new students arrive at the University, recognising this as a key moment of change and that behaviours adopted at this point are likely to influence students' behaviours and attitudes in the future.[6]
  - o Include information on sustainable living in Glasgow in Freshers' packs for all new students. For instance, GUEST has produced 'Wee Green Guides' for students in Glasgow and specific Halls of Residences that could be used and built-upon.
  - o Enhance the use of modern social media, such as QR codes, to limit the dispersal of flyers and other promotional materials on campus during Freshers' Week where possible, which would help prevent the development of a culture of littering and disposability.

3.2 Transparency

We will:

- Make information on environmental policies and progress freely accessible to staff, students and the wider community.
  - o Ensure communication is clear and open about the environmental impacts of the University and open about plans to improve them.
  - o Make the Sustainability Strategy created in 2016 more accessible to the wider University community by making it easily accessible through the University webpages.
  - o Assist internal service departments in communicating data regarding sustainable practice and improvements.
- Compile an annual performance report, such as the Public Sector Climate Change Reporting Duty, and publicise this to the University community and the public.

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[6] Thompson, S., Michaelson, J., Abdallah, S., Johnson, V., Morris, D., Riley, K., & Simms, A. (2011). 'Moments of change' as opportunities for influencing behaviour: A report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. NEF (the new economics foundation). Defra, London.

- Present these data in an engaging and accessible format, such as simple info-graphics.
- Provide opportunities for the University community to give feedback on environmental policies and progress; there should be a two-way communication as much as possible.
    - Run public Q&A sessions regarding major issues such as responsible investment and the campus redevelopment.
    - Look into creating an online form to allow people to give feedback in a less public space.
    - Hold quarterly sustainability drop-in sessions, or other informal spaces for discussion, for staff or students looking for information or wanting to give feedback.

3.3 Consistency

We will:

- Establish internal lines of communication between relevant departments and individuals at the University in order to create consistent and connected environmental communication for the broader community.
    - Establish annual timeline of environmental events and dates to increase internal understanding of each other's actions, to allow planning to minimise diary crowding and clashes.

3.4 Creativity

We will:

- Make environmental communication interesting and engaging for all members of the University community.
    - Use available resources and expertise to ensure messaging is framed in ways that make it relevant to the university community.
    - Use audience segmentation to target communications to different audiences. For example the GUEST team and the social media staff could be utilised to help produce creative and enticing promotional material for students.
    - Use different communication channels appropriately and creatively to demonstrate commitment to environmental issues:
        - Social media as a way to share eye-catching environmental content and upcoming events with the University community and wider public.
        - Internal communications such as e-news, emails and home screens on computers to publicise environmental advice (e.g. in offices: turn computer off when you're finished), facilities (e.g. Bike Hub) and policies.
        - The University website to consolidate and connect the variety of action happening across the University.
        - E-screens to show relevant environmental information for that particular location: e.g. show web portals displaying amount of energy used by that building and advice to reduce this; facilities

offered nearby such as bike racks, discounts for reusable coffee cups in cafes and locations of water fountains.

3.5 Academia

We will:

- Assist the Sustainable Development Network in the promotion of their work
  - Ensure the webpage is up to date, including current contact details, events and courses
- Use communications to connect and showcase the work being done by academics and students at the University of Glasgow in the absence of a dedicated sustainability department.
  - Promote research conducted on environmental sustainability and make this visible to the University community.
  - Encourage academics to work with GUEST, internal communications and important regional partners such as the Glasgow Science Centre to create ways to present relevant research in a quick and accessible way.
  - Explore the opportunities to increase the participation and visibility of environmental science / engineering in entrepreneurial activities, such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and similar initiatives.

3.6 Value-based

We will:

- Recognise that no public communication is value-neutral and that by publicising certain values the University is promoting similar values and diminishing opposing values.[7]
  - Commit to the University's values, such as embracing diversity, working to benefit the local and global community and undertaking work in an ethical and sustainable manner, and ensure these are not be contradicted by any University communication.[8]
  - Ensure all University communication aims to promote intrinsic and self-transcendent values such as benevolence and universalism in order to encourage commitment to bigger-than-self issues such as climate change.
  - For a more thorough explanation of value based communication see Appendix A.

[7] Crompton, Common Cause, 2010, p27.
[8] University Strategy 2015-2020:
http://www.gla.ac.uk/about/strategy/visionandmission/values/

Appendix A: Common Cause

This strategy advocates that the University of Glasgow adopts a value-based approach to environmental communication and wider communication with the public and university community.

Value based communication identifies the importance of values on people's interpretation and adoption of facts and other communication. It accepts that culture will always precede communication and therefore if it does not map onto someone's culture and values, communications will be ignored or adapted to fit. It does not however, advocate framing communication in order to fit its audience's perspective, regardless of which values it appeals to.

This framework identifies that no public communication is value-neutral. Theories such as 'Common Cause', claim that values can be mapped onto a chart, like the one shown in Figure 1.
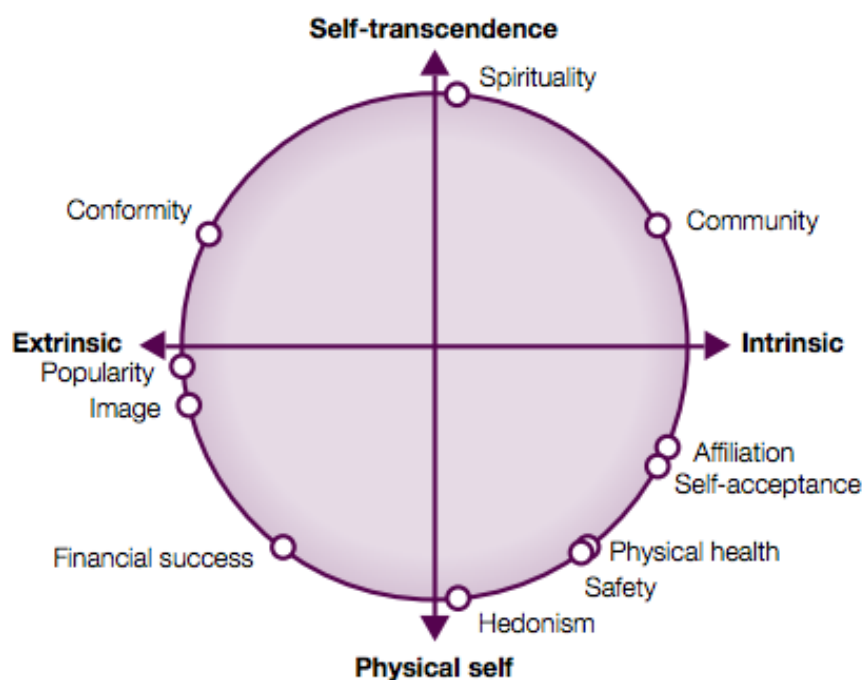

Figure 1: Crompton, Common Cause, (2010), p29

The theory states that by promoting any value, communication both strengthens the values nearby on the chart and diminishes those opposite it. This means that communication that appeals to extrinsic values, such as financial success and social status, will diminish more intrinsic values such as benevolence and community.

Appendix B. ISM model

The Individual, Social, Material model was designed at the University of Manchester and has since been adopted by prominent institutions, such as the Scottish Government.[9] It combines expertise from multiple disciplines, including behavioural economics, social psychology and sociology in order to address the challenge of changing behaviours within the complexity of modern society. The ISM model shows that to create effective change, interventions must be made at the level of the individual, such as values, skills, habit; the social, such as relationships, institutions, social norms; and the material, such as technologies, infrastructure and regulations.

[9] Darnton, A., and Evans, D., 2013, Influencing Behaviours: A Technical Guide to the ISM Tool, (The Scottish Government: 2013) [Accessed 5 March 2017] < http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0042/00423531.pdf>