



Report of the Working Party on Environmental Sustainability

21 November 2008

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1. History of the Working Party Process

At the end of 2007, the Vice-Chancellor told the University that he had set up a working party to advise on measures the University should be taking to promote the environmental sustainability of our campuses. The Working Party comprised:

Professor Hamish Spencer (Convener, Zoology)
 Mr Murray Gray (Financial Services)
 Mr Timothy Grigg (OUSA)
 Associate Professor Pat Langhorne (Physics)
 Mr Barry MacKay (Property Services)
 Professor Richard Morgan (Geography)
 Dr Louise Signal (Public Health, Wellington)
 Dr Anna Thompson (Tourism)

Miss Ruth Taylor, Executive Assistant to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & International) acted as secretary to the Working Party.

The agreed terms of reference for the Working Party were:

1. To define the guiding principles for environmental sustainability at the University of Otago, in relation to the University's Strategic Direction to 2012.
2. To prepare a paper outlining how these principles could be applied to improve the performance of the University in regard to sustainability.
3. To consider submissions from staff, students, and other stakeholders, in response to this paper.
4. To advise the Vice-Chancellor on actions that should be taken.

The Working Party met several times in early 2008 and prepared a discussion document that (i) defined possible guiding principles, (ii) outlined several options of how such principles might be implemented and (iii) gave examples of how these principles might be put into practice. This discussion paper was distributed throughout the University, along with a request for feedback from the University community and its stakeholders.

Almost 140 submissions, which covered almost every aspect of the discussion paper, were received from students, academic staff and general staff across all divisions and campuses, and there were also several collective responses from departments and interest groups. Support for the University adopting an environmental sustainability policy was very strong: 121 submissions were unconditionally in favour and just one submission was against. This remarkable level of response confirms the importance to the whole University of issues surrounding environmental sustainability. The submissions were considered by the Working Party in producing the revised guiding principles and in recommending an implementation mechanism, both described below. Most submitters also suggested practical ways in which environmental sustainability could be enhanced within the University, and these suggestions, some of which have been incorporated into the Appendix, will be made available to those in charge of implementation.

2. Context

The University of Otago recognizes that, as a fundamental part of its mission to enhance the well-being of individuals and society, it has a responsibility to be environmentally sustainable in all its activities: across its teaching and research programmes, as well as in management, commercial activities, policies and practices.

Sustainability principles are an increasingly important part of the wider legislative and decision-making environment within which the University operates in this country, at central, regional and local government levels. Over the last decade or more a number of initiatives have been taken to develop sustainability practices at the University, especially in campus planning and management. Examples include preparation of a campus sustainability plan by Property Services in the mid 1990s, and the sustainable design promoted in the new Psychology building. Nevertheless, these actions have been rather piecemeal and uncoordinated, and, more importantly, lack a clear policy mandate. Indeed, Otago is now one of just two New Zealand universities without an explicit environmental policy. Internationally, a large number of universities have adopted environmental sustainability policies and practices and major networks have been established to promote and support the implementation of those policies. One of the better known is based on the Talloires Declaration (1990), which sets out a 10-point programme to promote the contribution of the university sector to sustainable futures. To date, 378 higher education institutions worldwide have signed the declaration, although none from New Zealand as yet.

While there are clear moral arguments for adopting an environmental sustainability (ES) policy, it should also be recognized that environmentally sustainable policies promote better management throughout the University, especially in seeking more efficient use of resources. It is also a demonstration of our commitment to live by what we teach, which enhances the image of the University in the eyes of current and prospective staff and students, and in the wider community. We are aware, of course, that behaving in a sustainable manner often carries financial costs, at least in the short term, and may also arouse concerns about academic freedom. These issues present significant challenges for the University, which need to be taken into account.

The University recognizes that the location of its main campus, far from major population centres and international destinations, together with the geographically dispersed nature of its various campuses, also imposes particular challenges. To achieve our goal of environmental sustainability, the University will draw on the experience of similar institutions, as well as making innovative changes across all its campuses. These initiatives will augment the University's *Strategic Direction to 2012* and be consistent with agreements with Ngāi Tahu and other iwi, while aiming to avoid or at least minimise any net increase in bureaucracy.

There are a number of definitions of sustainability. For the purposes of this report, we use the phrase environmental sustainability to refer to a broad set of ideas: for example, the wise use of natural resources; moving to renewable resources where possible; minimising the production of wastes; maximising opportunities to recycle resources; reducing our impacts on ecological systems; contributing to the wellbeing of people and communities, locally, nationally and internationally, and minimising environmental impacts on them; retaining options for future generations; and so forth.

3. Recommendations

The Working Party recommends that the University adopts an explicit policy to be environmentally sustainable in all its activities: across its teaching and research programmes, as well as in management, commercial activities, policies and practices. To that end, we also recommend that the following Guiding Principles be adopted and that the structure for implementation outlined below be put into effect.

(a) Guiding Principles

The University of Otago will:

1. Develop, implement and monitor policies and practices that nurture a culture of environmental sustainability in the University.
2. Invest in, develop and maintain the University's campuses, facilities, and services so that they embody the principles of environmental sustainability and foster an improved stewardship of the social, economic, cultural, and physical environment in which the University operates.
3. Promote environmental sustainability in the policies and practices that pertain to all aspects of the carrying out of the University's research.
4. Encourage the incorporation of sustainability perspectives into appropriate areas of the University's teaching activities, to enhance students' ability to evaluate environmental sustainability issues critically.
5. Promote the principles of environmental sustainability in the practice of the University's community service.

(b) Implementation

An environmental sustainability (ES) policy is relevant to all aspects, and all levels, of the University's operations. The Working Party considered several options for managing such a policy and believes the following structure is the most appropriate:

- A Director, Sustainability, located in the Vice-Chancellor's Office. Responsible for the development of policy and processes, research and communications; and
- An Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator, located in Property Services. Responsible for managing the practical work that falls within the remit of Property Services, implementing the policies and plans developed through processes managed by the Director; and
- An Advisory Committee, consisting of
 - A Convener (senior academic)
 - The Director, Sustainability
 - The ES Co-ordinator
 - A representative from each of the academic Divisions
 - Two representatives from the Service Divisions
 - A representative from OUSA
 - with the power to co-opt.

In our view this structure has a number of advantages. First, having a director in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor sends a strong message to the University community and beyond that the above principles have support at the highest level. Second, this location seems ideal for the development of policies affecting the whole University, including its research and teaching activities, and their dissemination across all Divisions and campuses. Achieving true environmental sustainability requires a change of culture, as did an appropriate response to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. For this reason we see the position of the Director of the Office of Māori Development as a successful model for a Director, Sustainability. Third, many of the sustainability policies will directly affect the practical operations of the University, and it will be the responsibility of Property Services to implement such measures. It would seem appropriate to have someone in Property Services – the Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator – whose key role is to ensure these measures become part of everyday practice. Fourth, as we noted above, there is an enthusiasm in the University for moving towards greater environmental sustainability. An advisory committee can harness such widespread support, acting as a conduit for ideas and providing feedback to both the Director and the ES Co-ordinator, and helping in the flow of information about policies and practices back to the rest of the University. Finally, having the convenor of an advisory committee as some other than the Director and the ES Co-ordinator engenders an independence that should lead to both a greater buy-in from the University community, as well as a degree of oversight.

Much of the detailed work on developing specific plans, programmes, and activities would be carried out by the person(s) appointed to develop the implementation framework. This work needs to be undertaken in a spirit of inclusion, to encourage all members of the University to engage with the process, so their ideas and creativity can be brought together. Therefore, while it is not appropriate for this document to detail specific activities that will definitely be carried out, it is useful to consider some of the actions implied by the proposed principles. A start has been made by Peake and Scott (2006). We suggest further possibilities in the Appendix.

Appendix: Options for Implementing the Guiding Principles

Principle 1: Nurturing a culture of environmental sustainability

1. Review the existing University policy database and amend as appropriate and in a manner that avoids additional bureaucracy.
2. Provide short courses for all staff interested in expanding their understanding of environmental sustainability practices.
3. Include a section on the University's environmental sustainability policy in the induction for new staff run by the Higher Education Development Centre (HEDC) and Human Resources.
4. Incorporate assessment of environmental sustainability into the terms of reference for departmental reviews
5. Provide academic staff with easy access to educational resources for environmental sustainability (ES), and related topics.
6. University publications to give prominence to sustainability issues and initiatives e.g. Staff Bulletin.

Principle 2: Environmentally sustainable campuses and facilities

1. Establish and implement University policies on waste management, energy/water utilisation, purchasing systems, development construction, benchmarking and reporting.
2. Optimise use of resources by the University by:
 - Appointing a Sustainability Co-ordinator within Property Services to administer University policies and systems in relation to waste, recycling, purchasing, construction and planning.

What might this mean in practice?

- The establishment of facilities to minimize the amount of waste, particularly technology and construction waste, sent to landfill (e.g., recycling batteries).
- The establishment of composting/worm farming programmes to reduce amount of material sent to landfill.
- Establishment of programmes for the reuse of construction materials, paper, plastics and technology waste.

- Developing robust policies and key performance indicators (KPIs) around the purchase and use of energy and water within University buildings and on its campuses.
3. Implement purchasing systems that give preference to environmentally sustainable products and processes.
 4. Ensure that campus planning processes consider environmental impact in all development, redevelopment and maintenance projects. It is particularly important that new construction and adaptive re-use are balanced against one another and that transportation and technology options are included in all proposals.
 5. Establish benchmarking and reporting processes that measure and report the University's progress towards "green and sustainable" campuses.

What might this mean in practice?

- Sustainability Coordinator will develop KPIs and coordinate the sustainability component of the Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association (TEFMA) Benchmark in which the University currently takes part.
- Regular communication with the wider University community on KPIs and the “greening of the campuses”.

Principle 3: Environmental sustainability practices in the University’s research

1. Researchers should consider the environmental consequences of their research and be aware of potential conflicts with the University’s environmental sustainability policies.
2. Attempt to find alternatives to travel for research purposes, for example by improving the ease of use and cost of audio- and video-conferencing.
3. Raise awareness of the principles of sustainability when conducting research, including that of graduate students.

What might this mean in practice?

- Introducing incentives to encourage sustainable behaviour, such as a prize for the graduate student who has taken most care to be environmentally sustainable in the conducting of their research.
- Raising of profile of sustainable practices by holding an annual, prestigious research lecture that would be rotated around the Divisions.
- Adding a section on sustainability to the PhD and MSc handbook.
- Add short section to University applications in which applicant outlines how research conforms to the University’s sustainability principles.
- Encouraging both academic and general staff to attend professional development programmes to ensure research is conducted according to the principles of sustainability.

4. Make environmentally sustainable choices when purchasing research equipment.

What might this mean in practice?

- Local and regional suppliers to be given preference where possible.
- University-maintained list of “green” suppliers.
- Researchers should be encouraged to consider the following, in addition to price, when making a purchase:
 - is the item durable?
 - does the item minimise depletion of non-renewable resources?
 - can the item be disposed of in a non-polluting, environmentally-responsible manner?
 - what is the environmental cost of the item?

Principle 4: Environmental sustainability practices in the University’s teaching

1. Establish a University level “board of studies” for environmental studies to review existing programmes and identify opportunities for new papers or programmes.
2. Encourage research into education for environmental sustainability, to assist programme development (including professional development courses).

What might this mean in practice?

- Encourage initiatives in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

3. Establish Environmental Care Codes at Divisional or Departmental level to guide staff/student environmental conduct in class room settings and on field trips.

What might this mean in practice?

- Developing sensible use of copiers, printers, lab materials, equipment, etc by students (and staff) in teaching activities, e.g., all printing should be duplex where printers allow; having a programme of printer upgrading to allow duplex printing; limiting the use of handouts in teaching.
- Use of well-maintained, efficient vehicles.
- Disposal of chemicals in proper fashion.
- Managing IT resources to reduce energy use: nights/weekends/ holidays, etc.
- Minimizing ecological, social and cultural impacts during field trips.

4. To encourage student-led environmental initiatives.

What might this mean in practice?

- Student Councils in Residential colleges might appoint environmental sustainability co-ordinators (senior students) to advise residents on practical ways to be sustainable.
- Collaborating with and resourcing OUSA to develop student-led environmental initiatives:
 - OUSA might develop guidance and competitions, and provide advisors, to target students in flats and encourage more environmentally sustainable behaviour.
 - OUSA to develop an Environmental Sustainability guide to inform students in their educational endeavours whilst in residences and on campus, to be made available at enrolment.
- Support for SEA - Students for Environmental Action.

Principle 5: Environmental sustainability practices in the University's community service work

1. Supporting the environmental sustainability initiatives of the wider community.

What might this mean in practice?

- Build partnerships to progress environmental sustainability with the local and wider community, including regional councils, Ngāi Tahu and other Māori communities, other universities, government and industry.
- Develop community leadership in improved environmental management.

2. Where appropriate, take responsibility for decision-making on environmental sustainability matters in the community service work of the University (e.g., by

facilitating the incorporation of sustainability ideals into public documents and statements).

3. Encouraging advocacy for, and support to, environmental sustainability in the University's community service work.

What might this mean in practice?

- Publicise work by the University, including research, academic and operational, on sustainability matters.
- Develop case studies of community service work where environmental sustainability was advocated/supported (e.g., negotiate an MoU with Orokonui Ecosanctuary to offset carbon emissions from international travel).
- Build information about environmental sustainability in community service into orientation for staff and students.

4. Raising awareness of staff and students about the need for environmental sustainability and how to put it into practice in their community service work

What might this mean in practice?

- Workshops, letter from the VC, showcasing successes big and small (e.g., in the Otago Bulletin, guest speakers with experience in this area).

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