

Formal collaboration amongst four tertiary education institutions to advance environmental sustainability.

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1. Introduction

There is increasing awareness in the tertiary education sector in Australia and New Zealand that many of its activities are not environmentally sustainable and need to be changed. In most cases tertiary educational institutions (TEI) are working individually to address environmental sustainability (ES) while taking advantage of a range of information sources and networks, such as Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS) to help them achieve their ES aims. In the Canterbury region of New Zealand the four major TEIs have formed an official joint working group to address environmental sustainability on all their campuses. The Environmental Sustainability Working Group (ESWG) started in late 2003 as a grass roots network of staff and students who were interested in ES from the four institutions. The vision was to provide a forum for mutual support, sharing knowledge, information and experience, thereby resulting in faster implementation of ES initiatives at the member institutions.

To give the group sufficient 'authority' to achieve its aims it was considered vital that the group be officially recognised by the institutions and have the support of senior management. This was achieved under the 'umbrella' organisation the Canterbury Tertiary Alliance (CTA) (www.cta.ac.nz). The CTA is a formal alliance between the University of Canterbury (UC), Lincoln University (LU), the Christchurch College of Education (CCE) and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) and was formed in 2001. The aim of the CTA is "to ensure that Christchurch's four major providers develop tertiary education choices in Canterbury in a complementary way. This ensures cooperation in best practice, cost efficiencies, collegiality and ultimately benefits our students" (www.cta.ac.nz/news/cta1.pdf), examples of other CTA activities are joint purchasing initiatives for information technologies and libraries and reciprocal library borrowing rights). Terms of reference for the Environmental Sustainability Working Group (Figure 1) were endorsed by the CTA executive in June 2004. The CTA executive consists of the Vice Chancellors, Principal and Chief Executive of the member institutions and other senior managers. With this authority the ESWG moved on to develop its first major project: waste minimisation.

Canterbury Tertiary Alliance (CTA) – Environmental Sustainability Working Group Terms of Reference

1 Purpose

The CTA Environmental Sustainability Working Group's (CTA-ESWG) role is to promote an increased awareness and advancement of environmental sustainability issues within the CTA. It will provide a CTA forum for discussing environmental sustainability matters, and will promote cooperation and collaboration amongst CTA members on specific sustainability initiatives.

2 Membership

Representatives from each CTA institution, including:

- An environmental coordinator (or representative from the institution's environmental group)
- A senior manager
- A student representative
- Academic staff members

With co-opted members as required

One institution will provide a chairperson, executive secretary, and secretarial support for the working group for a year. This responsibility will rotate amongst the member institutions on an annual basis as selected by the Committee.

3 Meetings

Meetings shall be held bimonthly (excluding January and December), or at other times as determined by the group. Times of meetings are to be agreed by Working Group members. Five members must be present to constitute a quorum.

4 Agenda/Minutes

An agenda will be sent to all members of the Working Group at least four working days in advance of the meeting. An

accurate set of minutes will be produced after each meeting containing recommendations and actions points, and shall be forwarded promptly to Group members, and others on request.

5 Aims and Objectives

The CTA Environmental Sustainability Working Group is to:

- 5.1 Promote cooperation and collaboration across the CTA on initiatives leading member institutions towards environmental sustainability in all their activities. This includes policy, curriculum, research, operations, and extension activities.
- 5.2 Provide a forum for CTA staff and students to discuss and participate in sustainability issues, and provide an opportunity to raise the profile of sustainability awareness across all activities undertaken by CTA institutions.
- 5.3 Provide an annual report to the CTA on member institutions' progress towards environmental sustainability.
- 5.4 Liaise with other New Zealand tertiary institutions to promote environmental sustainability within the tertiary education sector New Zealand-wide.
- 5.5 Represent CTA institutions within local, national, Australasian, and global tertiary education sustainability networks and forums.

6 Assistance

The working group will seek reasonable facilities and such assistance as is necessary to enable its representatives to carry out their functions.

Figure 1. Terms of Reference for the CTA-ESWG

2. The 'towards zero waste' initiative

In 2004 CTA members had limited or no recycling systems, although attempts were being made to start or expand recycling on most campuses. It was viewed that there could be cost savings if all CTA members cooperated on the design and implementation of their recycling systems, e.g., through joint contracts and purchasing. From this grew a wider proposal to go beyond 'just' recycling and adopt a whole-systems zero waste programme. A scoping proposal entitled "Towards zero waste: a whole-systems waste minimisation strategy" was put to, and accepted by, the CTA executive in June 2004, the key points of which were:

- For CTA members to eliminate waste to landfill by 2015, with a 75% reduction by 2009;
- That the strategy should be a whole campuses approach, covering all facets of the university, including policy, research, curricula, extension and facilities management, and with all members of the university being involved, i.e., academics and students not just facilities management;
- That it should not just be focused on resource use and disposal, but should also through its academic programmes critically examine the current economic, political, and social systems to understand the underlying causes of waste and other unsustainable behaviours, and contribute research on redesigning systems towards producing less and eventually no waste;
- That each campus forms a taskforce to draw up a detailed proposal on how it will implement the zero waste strategy;
- That the CTA-ESWG has an overseeing and co-ordinating role between the campus's taskforces.

This is widely viewed as a major achievement, in that all the 'CEOs' have agreed to the proposal in principle and the taskforces are now working on the details. Without the ESWG such progress would not have been made or would have been much slower.

3. Conclusions

The CTA-ESWG is a unique initiative for addressing ES in TEIs. While competition between TEIs has increased in both Australia and New Zealand the CTA-ESWG is a model of how it is possible for TEIs to collaborate to reduce their environmental impact and move towards environmental sustainability.