

Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme

Concept Document and Operational Work Programme

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Rationale

Much progress has been made in the field of sustainable development all over the world since the publication of “Our Common Future” in 1987, and since the Summits held in Rio (1992 and 2012). The field of sustainable development as a whole, and sustainable development research in particular, has evolved substantially over the past twenty-five years. The end of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) has marked the start of a new era, titled “Sustainability 2.0”. At a time when the UN is stepping efforts towards pursuing the “Sustainable Development Goals”, sound research on sustainable development is required more than ever before.

One of the gaps still seen, is in respect of the abilities of universities to perform high quality sustainability research. Therefore, it is believed that a set-up such as the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme**, will provide a contribution towards the efforts of member universities to consolidate their initiatives in the field of sustainable development in many ways. For instance:

1. *By increasing their research income:* income from research projects may be increased by means of sustainable development research. Statistics show that sustainable development expertise clustered around research centres or programmes are more successful, than ad hoc efforts and research bids by individuals alone.
2. *By an enhancement of institutional research profiles in the field of sustainable development:* at present, only a few universities already have an international and authoritative research profile in this field, even though they have a great potential to develop it. This potential can be further optimized and increased, by means of more coordinated approaches to bid and secure national and international funding, for interdisciplinary and cross-faculty projects on matters related to sustainable development, and by increasing their visibility.
3. *By an increase in the intake of PhD students:* many universities have the potential to be attractive places for PhD students focusing on sustainability research, but at present – for various reasons – do not fully use it. The PhD programme to be led by the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will help to realize this potential, and offer the critical mass needed to train a new generation of sustainability experts, across the whole spectrum of themes and topics associated with it.
4. *By an increase in publication output:* apart from income and profile-building, the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will help its members to achieve more substantial research outputs, which may be translated in the publication of more papers in indexed journals, as well as innovative books and book chapters. The International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education and the newly created “World Sustainability Series”, the

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leading book series on the topic, are some of the instruments to be used, as well a wider access to the world's leading journals on environment and sustainable development matters.

The **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will consolidate and further develop the available know-how and profile on sustainable development among its member universities across the world, helping them to take full advantage of the many possibilities for institutional consolidation and individual career development which sustainability research offers.

A working programme (2015-2020) for the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** has been prepared and is now under implementation. It will be coordinated by Manchester Metropolitan University (UK), but each member university is autonomous in respect of their individual activities, funding and operations.

Aims

The main aim of the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** is to establish a platform, on which member universities may undertake more research on matters related to sustainable development, according to an agreed work plan and agenda.

The **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will ensure that energetic, committed experts at member universities have a sound basis upon which they can attract and undertake research projects, train PhD students, publish more in indexed journals, and organize high caliber events, working more closely with their peers (a clear requirement in the sustainable development research community) and hence strengthening their personal and institutional profiles.

In addition, the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will strive to develop the ability to leverage organizational resources and maximize the benefits research projects may bring to member universities. The specific aims of the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** are to:

- assemble interdisciplinary, cross-Faculty teams among its member universities, focusing on sustainable development, with a keen interest to engage on bidding for national and international sustainability research projects;
- set-up and upkeep a working environment that is fertile for international cooperation, supporting institutional and inter-institutional project development, and hence increase the chances of success in project bidding and acquisition;
- link and engage the sustainability research community at member universities, in the joint training of PhD students and the organization of specific, strategic events;

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- catalyse and facilitate the production of high quality joint publications in indexed journals, as well as in ground-breaking books and book chapters, in cooperation with well-established publishers.

Operationally, the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will develop projects which may be submitted for funding to national and international agencies and funding bodies. It will also provide a key support in the promotion of cooperation in the field of sustainable development between the member universities, in a way never seen before.

Themes

The **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** focuses on the subject matter of sustainable development, as a cross-cutting issue, and on specific topics which are mainstream in the international sustainability research agenda. The list of topics includes (but is not limited to):

- Sustainable energy production (renewable energy) and use (energy efficiency)
- Sustainable production & consumption
- Sustainable water use and management
- Sustainable waste management
- Sustainable transport
- Sustainable development and climate change (including adaptation and resilience)
- Education for sustainable development and curriculum innovation in sustainable development
- Sustainability in higher education institutions (e.g. campus greening)

Other topics may be added to the list, according to the expertise brought by the member universities and interested colleagues.

Strategic relevance



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Apart from the fact that joining a programme of such high calibre will greatly enhance the profile of member universities, some other key factors which speak for joining the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** are as follows:

- The high level of interest in the topic, which is likely to be maintained in the future
- The large demand-supply gap seen in respect of sustainability research
- The wide availability of funding to support sustainable development research from public and private bodies
- The existence of ambitious government policies in the field, whose implementation at least partly depends on research;
- The wide existence of financing options available in respect of project funding (e.g. as project coordinator, as project partner, as external consultancy, etc)
- The keen interest from industry, banks and other sectors in the topic
- The possibility to train PhD students, produce publications and run influential events at member universities.

At present, the global expenditure in respect of sustainable development research (including the areas outlined in the item “themes”) are estimated at being about USD 1 billion per year. The **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will help to unlock substantial funding possibilities for integrated projects on sustainability issues, where, for instance, universities and governments, or universities and industry may work together.



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Coordination and Partners

The founding organizations of the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** are Manchester Metropolitan University (UK) where its Secretariat is based, and the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (Germany). A Memorandum of Understanding is signed with Partner universities (via a Letter of Commitment), in order to formalize their involvement with the programme. Partner universities may then be able to refer to themselves as members of IUSDRP, and can take part in all its activities, organize or co-organize events and coordinate or be partners in IUSDRP-led projects.

Operational Aspects

The **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will group researchers at partner universities with an interest in sustainable development research, and its ramifications. The aim is to reinforce their profile and allow them to take more advantage of the many benefits this topic offers.

The work of the programme will be overseen by an **International Advisory Board**, composed by some of the world's leading experts on sustainability, who will provide advice, guidance and support the implementation of the programme's activities.

The operational components of the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** involve five inter-related **core tasks**:

- **Project bidding and implementation:** this is the core of the Programme, where Partners will apply and/or co-apply for funding and undertake projects on matters related to sustainable development.
- **Publications:** the Programme will create publishing opportunities in the field of sustainable development, which includes special issues in indexed journals, set-up of teams of authors to work on joint papers, and the launching of ground-breaking book projects.
- **Training:** the Programme will seek to unleash the leadership potential of partner universities in respect of training as a whole, and MSc/PhD training in particular, on sustainable development issues. Here emphasis will be given to provision of training on methods, approaches, strategies and the execution of projects related to sustainable development, at various levels.
- **Know-How Transfer:** the Programme will, by means of practical projects, transfer the best available know-how and expertise on sustainable development available in the partner universities to others, helping them to advance the cause of sustainability at the institutional level;

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- **Institutional strengthening:** by means of networking, the Programme will help to build systems and networks that can respond most effectively to emerging funding opportunities, and hence strengthen the member organisations.

A flagship of the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will be the “**World Symposium on Sustainable Development at Universities**” (WSSDU) series, which is the leading event in the field. Organised bi-annually, WSSDU congregates the leading organisations and experts on sustainability in higher education, proving a unique opportunity for information exchange, networking and for the documentation of project work and dissemination of results from research projects. This is complemented by the “**World Sustainable Development Teach-In Days**” (also a bi-annual event), the use of the **World Sustainability Series** (published by Springer, one of the world’s top 5 scientific publishers) to produce high caliber books, and the **International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education**, the world’s leading academic journal in the field.

Thanks to its integrative and truly international approach, the **Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme** will achieve effective mobilization of staff and resources, and use strategic events to attract the attention of scientists, policy-makers, community members and media representatives. Ultimately, it will broad awareness about the partner universities, and of their sustainable development research capabilities.

Contacts

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Provisional Work Programme (2015 – 2020)

November 2015

- Official Launching

November–December 2015

- Joining of founding member universities

January-July 2016

- Joining of member universities

September 2016

- World Symposium on Sustainable Development at Universities (WSSD-U-2016) (United States)

October 2016

- Yearly start of the inter-university doctoral programme on environment and sustainable development

March 2017

- World Sustainable Development Teach-In Day
- World Symposium on Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development (Malta)

April 2017

- World Symposium on Sustainability Science and Research (UK)

September 2018

- World Symposium on Sustainable Development at Universities (WSSD-U-2018) (Malaysia)

October 2018

- Yearly start of the inter-university doctoral programme on environment and sustainable development

March 2019

- World Sustainable Development Teach-In Day

September 2020

- World Symposium on Sustainable Development at Universities (WSSD-U-2020)

October 2020

- Yearly start of the inter-university doctoral programme on environment and sustainable development

The submission of project bids will be **continuously** pursued, and will be undertaken as soon as relevant calls for projects are issued by national and international funding bodies.



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Becoming a member of IUSDRP

Membership to IUSDRP is by invitation only, and is free of charges. If you feel your institution shares the philosophy, goals and research interests of IUSDRP, then please contact the Chairperson to discuss a possible membership.