Introduction

The Business School at Coventry University has had a long standing commitment to PRME, being one of the original signatories in 2007. However the Business School sits within a much larger Faculty of Business, Environment and Society (BES) which includes the Law School and a range of social science, environmental science and humanities discipline areas. The Faculty has about 8,000 students with the Business School comprising just over half the student body. This unique combination of discipline areas is reflected in the Faculty’s four main research centres which operate on a multi-disciplinary cross Faculty basis. The four centres undertake research and consultancy in areas related to food security (CAFS), peace and reconciliation (CPRS), economic development and regeneration (SURGE) and social justice (CSR). The issues discussed in this case story relate to how to connect the sustainability related work of the research centres to the teaching on the main courses plus how to spread consideration of PRME out of the Business School to courses across the whole Faculty.

Challenges

Firstly, how to address the current disconnect between the Faculty’s research centres and teaching programmes. Although all the Faculty’s departments have research groups/ clusters that impact on their courses there is only minimal contact between the Depts and the cross Faculty research centres. Given the nature of the research undertaken in these centres there is currently a significant missed opportunity to enrich the content of courses with current ‘live’ research and sustainability-related case studies.

Secondly, the decision to spread PRME beyond the Business School recognises the fact that many graduates from the non-business courses actually progress to similar management-related careers as those from the Business School courses. In addition there is a growing expectation from all students that issues related to sustainability are addressed in their courses. However the specific challenge to be addressed is the need to develop a Faculty-wide view of sustainability which all the discipline areas feel they can relate to their courses.

Actions taken

To address the disconnection between the Faculty research centres and the courses a small group has been formed consisting of representatives from the research centres and teaching staff from the Departments. The direct involvement of research centre staff in courses through lectures and presentations was dismissed on the grounds of organisational practicalities and probable lack of student engagement. A more realistic and effective means is seen to be through the development of multimedia resource packs by the research centres. These will be stand-alone resources which course teams can use in a number of ways to fit the needs of their course.

In many ways the second challenge is more difficult. The commonly used standard definitions of sustainability tend to reflect a specific discipline focus. The same applies to P1 – Purpose, which reflects
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Issues around embedding PRME across a large multi-discipline faculty

the Business and Management basis from which PRME has been developed. Staff and students on the Business School’s courses readily see the relevance of P1 to their courses, however the same could not said for staff and students involved with most courses in the non-Business School part of the Faculty. The decision was taken not to take the obvious route and try to develop a definition of sustainability with which all areas of the Faculty feel comfortable. Instead the solution to be adopted has a more student focused approach. This will take the form of the Faculty adopting as a principle that all students can expect that their courses will provide opportunities for them to engage with issues around sustainability. The nature of the engagement will vary according to discipline area. The precise wording of what will be a student ‘statement of entitlement’ will be developed in conjunction with all areas of Faculty, both staff and students, to ensure maximum buy-in and commitment.

As a follow on to the adoption of a student ‘statement of entitlement’, and to effectively embed PRME across the Faculty, all Course Teams will be required to produce a course specific Self Improvement Plan (SIP). The course level SIP will become part of our existing course review process. By this means consideration of PRME will also become part of the Faculty’s formal reporting structure through Boards of Study and Faculty Board.

Results

The benefits for the Faculty will be a bringing together of our cross-Faculty research centre with Departments with a resulting increased awareness of each other’s work. However more importantly teaching staff and students will have the opportunity to explore issues around sustainability which are research/practice informed and contextualised within their discipline area.

One early result of discussing the PRME approach with non-Business School course teams has been the recognition of how students can engage with issues of sustainability within the context of their courses. Thus, for example, the Faculty’s History degrees now have a mandatory final year module in Environmental History whilst English students exam the development of ‘sustainability’ as a discourse and through the use of metaphor.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

For the faculty, PRME is important:

- As a means of connecting the wide range of sustainability related research undertaken within the Faculty to the Faculty’s courses.
- As a means to facilitate a discussion within the non-business part of the Faculty on how sustainability relates to their discipline area.
- By expanding discussion of PRME beyond the Business School it has re-emphasises ‘sustainability’ as one of the key underlying concepts on which the Faculty is based.