

Assessment Working Group Summary

ULSF/CE Consultation, March 30-31, 2001

Question: “What research and assessment tasks are essential to advance sustainability in higher education?”

1. Reasons for Assessment of SHE

We began by discussing the subject of Assessing Sustainability in Higher Education (SHE) on a basic level, focussing on two major questions:

- *Why* would we want to assess SHE?
- For *whom* do we want to do this?

We found the following answers for three sets of stakeholders:

Internal stakeholders (universities and their constituencies):

Potential uses are:

- Assessment can inspire new initiatives and innovation
- Assessment can contribute to policy development with respect to SHE, and to
- Measuring the results of the policies (both design and feedback are parts of a Deming Quality Circle)
- Assessment, if answering to certain demands, can help integrate SHE in the Total Quality Management of the university
- Assessment, if used for benchmarking, can have a stimulating effect on the university staff

External stakeholders (business, government, associations, organizations, etc.):

- Assessment can play a role in accreditation
- Assessment can play a role in certification ("green", "sustainable")
- Assessment can be used in decisions by funders (e.g., government, foundations, corporations)
- Assessment may be used for scientific investigation that examines the rate of success of various strategies for SHE, and thus contribute to the design of new and effective SHE projects
- And perhaps assessment can be used for special awards for successful SHE projects.

General public:

- Assessment followed by benchmarking (or other ways of comparing the results) can be used by future students or their parents for school selection
- Assessment will provide more information to the public (right to know), and create added incentives for institutions to perform well

Note: In order to be able to make comparisons between universities, and to make them understandable for people outside the universities, it would be good to find a limited, “streamlined” set of indicators, so-called *keystones* for SHE.

2. What do we need?

The working group decided that we don’t want only one assessment tool for global use.

There are too many differences between universities all over the world due to many factors: e.g. geographical; cultural; each school’s developmental stage regarding SHE.

We need four things:

a) A variety of assessment tools

We have a good overview of instruments that exist or are under development (Shriberg paper, for example). This will be our starting point. Goal is to design flexible, non-static, dynamic instruments.

b) A decision tree

We could create a “decision-tree” or decision matrix for prospective users which includes an analysis of existing tools and guidelines for deciding which assessment instrument is best for them regarding their particular situation and wants.

c) Assistance

The complexity of SHE is reflected in the nature and number of assessment tools currently in use. Ideally these instruments should be offered to universities with some form of assistance. This can be done in several ways, for instance:

- In the form of a consultancy (which means that the responsibility for the process is partially outside the university)
- As a training programme, in which staff members of universities are trained to perform the assessment themselves, as a part of the SHE development process.

d) A marketing strategy

Once we have 1-3, it will be important to let universities (and other institutions, e.g., government agencies) know that all this exists. This requires a marketing strategy.

3. A new working Group

At the end of the working group session, together we decided that we would form a more permanent Working Group that is to realise the four goals mentioned above.

Niko Roorda talked about plans for using his AISHE method in projects in the Netherlands and in Europe, starting in 2002, under the flag of the three major European networks on SHE:
 CRE Copernicus (www.cre-copernicus.de)
 EEE Network (www.eeenetwork.net)
 AuDes/Essence (www.vsnu.nl/essence)

We agreed to:

- Establish an email discussion group, so that the Working Group can operate efficiently through the Internet.
- Meet again at the next conference of CRE Copernicus (October 8-10, 2002 in Lüneburg, Germany). ULSF will arrange this with Hans-Peter Winkelmann (the secretary of CRE Copernicus).
- *Rick Clugston* will discuss the problem of financing the project of the Working Group with members of the Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership, consisting of ULSF, CRE-Copernicus, IAU (International Association of Universities) and UNESCO.
- *Niko Roorda* will investigate the possibility of involving EEE Network and AuDes/Essence in the project.

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