

Benchmarking Sustainability Research – A methodology for reviewing sustainability research at Kingston University.

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University educators have many competing priorities which can make the embedding of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) appear as yet another demand on limited time and resources. At the same time, there is a growing need to engage existing academics in sustainability and for high quality sustainability research to impact policy. The relative immaturity of sustainability as its own research area, the many areas covered by the term ‘sustainability’, and the sometimes interdisciplinary nature of some research projects, can lead to existing research which makes a significant contribution to sustainable development being either understated or categorised under other discipline areas and generally unable to contribute to the development of the international sustainability research agenda.

The work of over 450 staff was analysed using content and thematic analysis to identify those relating to sustainability, broadly defined as ‘economic, social, environmental, community, wellbeing, global and future equity’. The methodology was initially tested on a random sample of academics already participating in the Sustainable Knowledge Alliance and the Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy. The analysis identified 189 researchers interested in sustainability research issues, of which 56 academic staff were currently researching (and teaching) on issues related to sustainability. The research also identified the degree to which published research showed evidence of a set of key external viability factors identified as: ‘sustainability content, policy impact, and knowledge transfer viability’.

From this benchmarking review the extent of research on sustainability being carried out by the University was identified and demonstrated that many university educators are already contributing to this agenda, albeit under different discipline areas. The methodology is replicable by other HEIs and promises to enable researchers to engage in sustainability as a discipline, raise the profile of sustainability research both internally and externally and encourage greater cross-faculty working.