

Meet a... University Academic Director



**Chris Willmore, University
Academic Director of
Undergraduate Studies at the
University of Bristol**

How would you describe your job in a tweet i.e.140 characters?

Developing and leading institution-wide education for sustainability, linking estates, student union and formal curriculum initiatives.

What does an average day look like?

There is no average day! I have been the University Academic Director of Undergraduate Studies for three years – so that covers anything about undergraduate education. My role as institutional Green Academy Academic Lead has been part of that. The role is about horizon scanning – looking for new opportunities and encouraging them to flourish, bringing together estates, student union and academics to ensure we are giving students consistent and ever improving opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they will need to shape a better future for us all. Increasingly my day involves working with external partners – other institutions and the city and community in which we are based, to develop opportunities for our students to engage in change projects with practical outcomes. Increasingly I work with other institutions to build the global network and share the ideas we need if we are to create graduates who will tread more lightly on the planet.

What are the key skills and qualifications required for your job?

Academic leadership of sustainability in Higher Education (HE) is changing. It used to be lead mainly by academics from an education background – who worked in sustainability education across school and higher education, but people are now more specialised, so will tend to focus upon school or HE based Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). As the field grows people are coming into it from other disciplines – I'm a law academic by background. Academic leadership roles depend upon experience as an academic and then a commitment to sustainability education. Understanding change leadership in Higher Education Institution's (HEIs) is the key skill.

What training and continuous professional development do you require?

There is little direct training available in relation to ESD leadership. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) Professional Skills Framework structures professional development for academics – and then there are lots of leadership courses which develop change leadership skills. But apart from the Green Academy that the HEA ran twice there is no dedicated training/CPD for academic leadership of ESD. The Green Academy is sorely missed and desperately need a Green Academy 3.

What are your top three responsibilities?

Plate spinning! Encouraging and enabling innovation. Linking formal, informal and subliminal learning. Championing change internally and externally.



To help our members understand more about the roles in further and higher education institutions, we've created a suite of career profiles. These share the main responsibilities and skills and knowledge required of many of the key roles that play a part in embedding sustainability in a tertiary education institution.

View the entire suite at
www.eauc.org.uk/meet_a_member

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Tell us something surprising about your job that people may not know about?

I never cease to be surprised and delighted by the amazing ideas that come from students.

What are the positives and negatives of the job?

Sometimes change can be slow, sometimes you are running to catch up with it – ideas and initiatives can take off very suddenly. A negative is that however much we are doing, you go to an event and listen to others and realise how many other things there are you want to do.

Do you manage a budget, and what are your key priorities for this?

Yes, but thankfully only a small one. We've chosen to embed our work in the mainstream budgets, so I am free to be a champion of change and am not bogged down with budget management (apart from research grant management).

What does the path to career progression in this role look like?

You come into the role from being an academic interested in the student experience/teaching and learning. It leads to/is part of senior institutional leadership roles, focussed on education /the student experience.

What is the minimum and maximum salary band for this role?

It depends how the role is positioned and how senior it is – but academic leadership roles with institution wide responsibilities will tend to be in the professorial salary range (which varies by institution) e.g. £60,000 - £90,000.

What advice do you have for graduates and other potential candidates who are considering joining?

There is a crying need for research and evaluation of what is happening with ESD in HEIs – so combine research and developing your own initiatives. Horizon scan to develop initiatives for the future.

For institutions without a Green Academy Academic Lead – what 3 aspects of your role do you think are the most important for any institution's sustainability journey?

Having someone with the experience and seniority to open doors and ensure initiatives are encouraged. Ensuring estates, the Student Union, academics and research leaders can work together easily to deliver a joined up approach. Ensuring the institution is clear about what it wants to do to be more sustainable.

What department do you and your line manager sit in? Which departmental interactions are vital for your role?

The function reports to the Pro Vice Chancellor Education and sits in the Vice-Chancellor's Office/Academic Registry.

What opportunities and challenges does working in a higher education institution bring? *How is this role different in tertiary education compared to another sector?*

What better opportunity is there than helping to equip generations of new graduates to tread more lightly on the planet. HEIs offer more scope for innovation and risk taking than most other parts of the public sector.

How do you communicate the outputs of your role to the wider institution, and what does this include?

A newsletter, green mingles, websites, regular space in the fortnightly staff emails, an open access wiki on which all sorts of materials are shared – and all sorts of tweets, blogs and Facebook. All the different parts of the team communicate so we hope if one approach misses you, another one will get to you!

What are the unique opportunities to embed sustainability in to this job?

The unique opportunity is to develop a whole institution joined up approach – by networking all the people who want to make a difference and then leading/co-ordinating/supporting that change.

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How has EAUC Membership helped you in your job and within your institution?

EAUC helped hugely from when we were a small number of individuals operating below the radar, and continues to help with contacts, new ideas, and most importantly leadership. EAUC has been central to linking HEI leaders who are committed to sustainability. Its badging through e.g. Green Gowns has really been hugely helpful in showcasing change and encouraging senior management engagement.

How can other Members contact you?

- Email: Chris.Willmore@bristol.ac.uk
- Telephone: 0117 954 5345
- Website: wikis.bris.ac.uk/display/bristolESD www.bristol.ac.uk/green-capital
- Twitter: www.twitter.com/BristolESD
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/BristolESD
- YouTube: www.youtube.com/BristolESD

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