



MISSION: SUSTAINABLE

UWC ATLANTIC COLLEGE'S
SARAH HAMILTON PROVIDES AN INSIGHT
INTO HOW SCHOOLS CAN CULTIVATE
AN ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY THAT
WILL BOTH INFORM AND IMPROVE
LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT...

1. Getting started

Invite members of your school community to create a Sustainability Council. Meet regularly, make practical suggestions, set achievable objectives and work towards them. Start by drawing up your ideas into a document (we've called ours a Sustainability Charter), and get it acknowledged by the school's management team. Within this document, outline your school's commitments to sustainability. Agree principles on anything from everyday school life to the design of new buildings and assessing the green credentials for school suppliers, and ensure they figure prominently in the building, development and decision-making processes of the school.

2. Dovetail with the ideals of your mission statement

Your Sustainability Charter should encapsulate the goals identified in your school's mission statement, if it has one. This will help gain acceptance for what you're trying to achieve by keeping it in line

with the objectives and ideals of your institution. For example, as a member of the United World College's Movement (UWC), our college is bound by UWC's mission statement to make "education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future" – a perfect fit for our Charter.

3. Review

Becoming sustainable is a journey, so it's vital you know where your school's journey begins. An effective review should include a series of simple questions for key areas: energy consumption, waste and recycling, water, transport, healthy living, biodiversity, school grounds and facilities, global citizenship, green procurement and pupil participation. The Eco-Schools project provides excellent free resources to help you review your school's campus and set appropriate targets.

4. Wider school involvement

Making a school sustainable takes more than just a small group of passionate people implementing new technology and procedures. Becoming truly sustainable requires a shift in

people's perception of sustainability and an understanding of the role each person can play in achieving those goals.

Talk to people at ground level. Initially, members of your Sustainability Council should take the time to visit and talk with each class (or boarding house) to outline your goals and ask for support.

Students are more likely to be influenced by their peers than authority figures. Therefore, appointing Sustainable Champions within each class is an important next step. These Champions can then co-ordinate how their individual classes wish to take part. The key is to engage students, not dictate to them; it's important that you allow students to voice their ideas and input into the way forward, rather than instructing them on how to take out your orders.

Students aren't likely to be the only stakeholders in your community. Be sure to include the ground-staff, kitchen-staff and wider faculty members in decision-making. For example, your canteen could well be throwing away valuable composting material that could be used to grow crops destined for the school lunches.



SUPPORT: ORGANISATIONS, FRAMEWORKS AND GUIDANCE

■ ECO-SCHOOLS

Eco-Schools is an international award programme that guides schools on their sustainable journey, providing a framework to help embed these principles into the heart of school life.

eco-schools.org

■ SALIX

Salix enables public sector organisations

across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to take a lead in tackling climate change by increasing their energy efficiency. Salix provides 100% interest-free capital for the public sector to reduce their energy costs by enabling the installation of modern, energy efficient technologies and replacing dated, inefficient technologies.

salixfinance.co.uk

■ GROUNDWORK UK

Groundwork is the community charity with a green heart. Their goal is to make places to look better, streets to be safer and outside areas to be green and beautiful and to show people how they can make their homes, schools and workplaces better for the environment and cheaper to run.

groundwork.org.uk

5. Make sustainability part of your curriculum

Teachers are always looking for ways to make subjects come alive and relatable to their everyday lives. Sustainability is a perfect example of how this can be achieved. For certain subjects, such as geography, biology or physics, this is relatively straight-forward. However, as the environment continues to be an issue at the fore of political and media agendas, issues of sustainability are increasingly useful tools when discussing issues of global politics, culture and region.

Learning outside of the classroom is not a new idea, but at UWC Atlantic College we find that working on environmental projects as part of our co-curriculum programme allows our students to develop the valuable leadership and critical thinking skills we aim to instil in the classroom.

6. Get support from within your school's local community

No school is an island and when trying to become sustainable every school should look to utilise and build on the expertise and resource available in their own communities. Becoming truly sustainable is an ambitious undertaking and learning from the experience of others can save time and efforts. Providing students with experts they can relate to is important, so don't hesitate to enlist any alumni with green credentials. These people will not only be able to help you learn sustainable practices, but will know those most suitable for your schools

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environment and the challenges you'll likely encounter. We regularly enlist the talents and knowledge of local beekeepers, gardeners, farmers and conservation groups.

7. Get students fully participating

Inspiring all students to invest and champion sustainability is a tall order. Quite often the key is providing a range of opportunities to get involved with. Start small to begin with; involving students in practical recycling initiatives is a simple but sure way of driving sustainability to the forefront of their minds.

As plans progress you can become more ambitious; our students study under a co-curriculum, which sees them split their time equally between academics and a range of experiential activities, sustainability being one. Over a period of years our students have been able to create a garden, with its produce set to be used by the College's caterers. Providing opportunities for our students to take part in projects outside of the school allows them to gain valuable skills which they can then implement onsite.

8. Conferences and focus weeks

No school will be in a position to be 100 per cent focused on any one goal 100 per cent of the time, so implementing sustainable practices into everyday life should be the goal. That said, allotting a set time in which your school can focus on sustainability can be incredibly rewarding.

At UWC Atlantic College we dedicate one week a year entirely to sustainability. That week allows each student and teacher the opportunity to learn about and become involved in our ongoing sustainability projects. This provides the opportunity for our Sustainability Champions and faculty groups to demonstrate their efforts and often leads to others joining in. Activities will range from working on internal projects, such as our school's kitchen garden, to aiding with external projects within the community. During the week we host an annual Sustainability Conference, where regular classes are suspended entirely to provide all students with the opportunity to learn from sustainability experts, including their peers. Start by inviting the external experts you are working with to come and speak at your event, or run workshops with the students. You should also invite students already working within the project to organise their own demonstrations.

I'd suggest starting small to begin with; in just a few years at UWC Atlantic College, our conference has grown from a couple of speakers and workshops, to a two-day event

with 350 students taking part.

9. Supporting fellow teachers

Staff and teachers should be encouraged to make sustainability part of their job description. Any business understands the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and schools should be no different. While you can't strong arm teachers into becoming green-minded overnight, they should be given the chance to take part in your sustainable efforts and learn alongside their students. Working outside on sustainable projects is both rewarding and stress-relieving and provides an excellent opportunity for new teachers to bond with students in a non-classroom environment.

10. Sharing success

Today people are more generally aware of the importance of sustainability. Once you have encouraged your school's community to make sustainability their goal, it is important to share the successes. In order to stay engaged and progress with the good work, teachers and staff need to know that their hard work is making a difference. Message boards regular updates in classes and special sustainability assemblies are a simple yet effective way of keeping your schools mission and its triumphs at the fore of students' minds.

11. Keeping track and developing your plan

Recording your work is vital. Whatever the size of goal, recording your efforts and evaluating their success is vital. When working to make an entire school sustainable it's easy for work to be replicated.

Understanding what has worked, or what has failed, is how you develop your plan. In many cases the data will already be available – your school's electricity bills can show if energy saving campaigns are effective, for example, and your catering department will already have records of food wastage. It's essential that these results are recorded against your initial objectives identified within your Sustainability Charter.

CREATING A SCHOOL KITCHEN GARDEN



There is always room to create a kitchen garden. Ultimately it doesn't matter if you have a spare field available or need to start with tubs.

1. Create an area for a kitchen garden, where students are free to experiment within clearly defined parameters.
2. Start small with a soft-fruit growing area, a vinery, a poly-tunnel, raised planting beds, composting bins and pumpkin mounds.
3. If space allows – try expanding to creating vegetable plots and a defined bio-diversity area. When selecting your crops its worth speaking to your catering staff to find out what fruit and vegetables they could use.
4. Start off simple when growing crops; rhubarb, salad, runner-beans, raspberries, spinach, and beetroot are all easy to grow. Once you've mastered the art of producing staples like these, try something more adventurous.
5. There's no such thing as waste water. Make it your first priority to repair roofs and guttering, collecting run-off water in butts.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sarah Hamilton is a Houseparent and Sustainability Conference Organiser at UWC Atlantic College in south Wales, the founding college of the international UWC Movement.

Each year 350 students from over 90 countries, attend the College to study its pioneering Atlantic Diploma and co-curricular programme.