

FN-DS03-IN01

DISCUSSIONS AND COACHING ON SUSTAINABILITY AND CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT WITH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

University

The main goal of this intervention was to promote sustainability in the university's curriculum reform process from 2021 to 2024, in other words, promote collective sustainability competences in the University of Jyväskylä. The aim was for sustainability to become visible, connected, and prioritised.

Resources

Human	
Time	
Costs	



With the ECF4CLIM project, we organised happenings, meetings, and discussions:

- 1) The ECF4CLIM project, Student Union, Student's Sustainability forum and sustainability officers of the university organized 24.1.2023 a seminar and a panel discussion on sustainability and curricula. Students were in a crucial role in organizing the seminar. They contacted faculties and asked representatives of curriculum planning to join the panel discussion and seminar. All faculties joined. They also advertised the seminar to students. Students also hosted the whole seminar and had a speech for participants. People from university administration joined the planning of the seminar. ECF4CLIM researchers facilitated the whole process and took part in informing, analysing and reporting about the seminar to the university. In addition to the seminar, during the intervention, the ECF4CLIM project created materials for curriculum development in sustainability, provided information on sustainability in curriculum reform, and held several other events for various faculties.
- 2) The ECF4CLIM researchers organised workshops and discussions with the Faculty of Education and Psychology, Jyväskylä University School of Business and Economics, and several student groups from Surent union. The goal was to coach students and teachers in the promotion of sustainability competences, based on the initial ECF4CLIM Roadmap, and sharing ideas on how to take part in the curriculum reform process. within the university. Target groups of the evenyts were the staff, teachers, and students of the university.
- 3) The ECF4CLIM researchers created materials for curriculum development about sustainability competences. The materials were shared on curriculum planning platform for all university personnel.
- 4) Implementation of the new curricula started autumn of 2024. In autumn 2024, after the impelentation of the new curricula started, the ECF4CLIM team from JYU asked a student group of various disciplines from the Students' Union to assess their own new curriculum. They identified several sustainability contents, and improvements from the previous curricula.

Relevant difficulties

The main obstacle to incorporating sustainability into studies appeared to be limited resources. Curriculum development was carried out alongside other responsibilities. Even teachers designing courses within the faculty lacked the resources for collaborative planning. Finding time to cooperate with the ECF4CLIM team was nearly impossible. The administration's mandate to include sustainability in every student's studies was left to the responsibility of individual teachers who were planning the courses. After the reform, this responsibility still relies on teachers' own initiative, as the curriculum statements are so general that they can be interpreted in various ways.

Also, it was hard to organise meetings with students, because they do not have time for extra work either, even if they were motivated or engaged in sustainability issues. Universities are nowadays very busy places with lots of different kinds of demands.

Engagement



The students organising the seminar were deeply engaged and motivated to promote sustainability. The seminar offered them a framework to send their message to all the faculty and the designers of the curriculum. The representatives of all the faculties joined the panel discussion. The meaning of the events, webinars and materials created in this intervention was to ease the curriculum designers' work in implementing sustainability contents in their curricula. The aim of the whole intervention was that all the faculties would engage in the sustainability contents in planning the curricula.

The ECF4CLIM project tried to engage people in coming to events by offering some coffee, too.

Connections



The intervention was connected to the curriculum reform of the university, so the framing of the intervention came outside the ECF4CLIM project. During the intervention, we found out that each faculty has the interests of their own interests, and sustainability is not at the core of curriculum design, but for example, division of resources, like how many hours are allocated to each course. Some disciplines have special demands for the contents of education connected to legislation (e.g. teacher education and psychology education), the curriculum frame is full, and it is hard to include courses focused on sustainability. The ECF4CLIM project had no close connection to the faculties (we researchers come from the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, which does not have directly students or linked degree courses), so it was hard to become part of their development process. The ECF4CLIM team was considered an outsider.

Change



At the beginning of the ECF4CLIM project, students expressed concern that studies at JYU do not sufficiently incorporate sustainability perspectives. They noted that at the university level, everything seems to start from scratch, and the teaching does not acknowledge the sustainability competence they have already developed in primary and secondary education. They emphasised the need to integrate sustainability competence into their disciplinary studies to deepen their understanding. The risk, both then and now after the reform, is that new sustainability content remains superficial, preventing meaningful change and the development of students' comprehensive, multidisciplinary sustainability competence. The students seemed to be more ready for the change towards sustainability, while teachers with established teaching habits and contents.

Actions



The students were deeply engaged in organising the seminar, which turned out to be the most successful part of the intervention. The main obstacle was the lack of time among both students and teachers (see the question below), which made cooperation between the ECF4CLIM team and other stakeholders difficult. This also contributed to the ultimate goal—more sustainable curricula—being less ambitious than originally planned.



Analytical Framework

Individual Competences

The students, the teachers, and the other staff gained knowledge about sustainability and sustainability competences during the process. Also, the students organising the seminar got skills in organising events, contacting the leaders of the faculties, and engaging people. The efforts of ECF4CLIM hopefully also affected the attitudes of the members of the JYU community through information on sustainability competences and a news article, both open to the whole community.

Collective Competences

The curriculum is a focal part of collective competences at universities. During the process, one of the themes that the university focused on was "Responsible expertise and sustainable development". The theme was based on the agreements and decisions made earlier by the university: The agreement between the University of Jyväskylä and the Ministry of Culture and Education, the vice rector decided that all future JYU graduates will have necessary understanding for the promotion and development of sustainability, The Environmental Programme of the University of Jyväskylä, and the Theses on sustainable development and responsibility of the Council of Rectors of Finnish Universities align these goals. The collective competences of JYU developed through the process: the curriculum has more sustainability contents than before. It cannot, though, be assessed what part of the development exactly is due to the ECF4CLIM project.

Technical- material Competences

Technical-material competences were not the goal in this intervention.