Sustainability and the Humanities: Shaping Culture and Community for a Changing World

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WELCOME!

1. Sustainability in Higher Education

What is this agenda about?

2. Sustainability and the Humanities

How do our disciplines tackle the agenda?

3. Questions and Challenges for the Day

1. Sustainability in Higher Education

What is this agenda about?

- *'Sustainability' is an elusive concept with* over 500 proposed definitions *– it is a shifting ideal and its meaning changes in different contexts*

- *Most commonly cited definitions refer to the 'need to improve quality of life for all without depleting the earth's natural resources' – pointing to* inter-generational equity, legacies and responsibilities

- *Recent definitions focus on the* construction of more positive futures for all *– probably as a backlash to fatalistic climate change predictions*

- *Universities are considering the* current and future impact of education, research, outreach and operations*, motivated by scientific challenges, their civic duties – and to distinguish themselves in the HE market*

- *Education for Sustainability urges* pedagogic and systemic change *in the purposes and practices of our education systems, to pursue sustainability*

Academic Development Challenges

**Shifting academic cultures and mental models:**

'Sustainable Development is more about new ways of thinking, than about science or ecology. Whilst it involves the natural sciences and economics, it is primarily a matter of culture.'

(UNESCO 2002 p.4)

Education for Sustainability

Shifting from: **sustainability related topics incorporated in course content (education *about* sustainability)**

Moving towards: **pedagogies of critical reflection, systemic thinking and engagement within curricula (education *for* sustainability)**
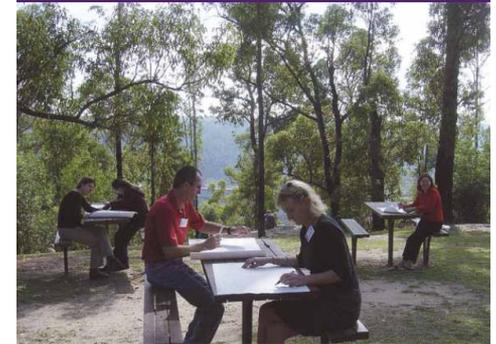
Source: **Education for Sustainability Guide for Educators,** developed by Dr Alex Ryan and Professor Daniella Tilbury for the University of Gloucestershire. Contact: aryan@glos.ac.uk

2. Sustainability and the Humanities

How do our disciplines tackle the agenda?

- **Extracting lessons from specific examples of sustainable and unsustainable development**

- **Building confidence to critique prevailing cultural trajectories and to propose alternative pathways**

- **Taking long term, global and comparative perspectives on questions of human survival**

- **Sidestepping 'paralysis by analysis' by unpacking the use of concepts such as 'nature' and 'progress'**

Humanities Concerns linked to Sustainability

- *Analysis of* human-environment relationships*, their ethical priorities and cultural practices, across diverse cultures and historical periods*

- *Reflection upon philosophical, religious and media* representations of utopia and apocalypse a*nd the symbolic devices used to promote them*

- *Exploration of the* religious and philosophical function *within cultures, the uses of ethics, and the role of hope, in the pursuit of greater sustainability*

- *Comparative and historical understanding of the* contexts for future human development *and the ways that conflicting values and interests compete*

- *Evaluation of the* ways that linguistic strategies channel and embed ideologies *across societies – and the means of exposing and subverting these processes*

3. Questions and Challenges for the Day

Q: What are the *responsibilities of the Humanities* in grappling with sustainability? What future directions and critical opportunities can be grasped?

Q: How can we help to improve understanding of these challenges, through interrogation of the *cultural record* and analysis of processes of *cultural change*?

Q: How we use *sustainability as an ideal and an image* that helps to bring together our individual and inter-disciplinary expertise in Humanities?

Q: What opportunities are presented by the *'impact' agenda*, in terms of gearing our teaching and research work towards the pursuit of sustainability?
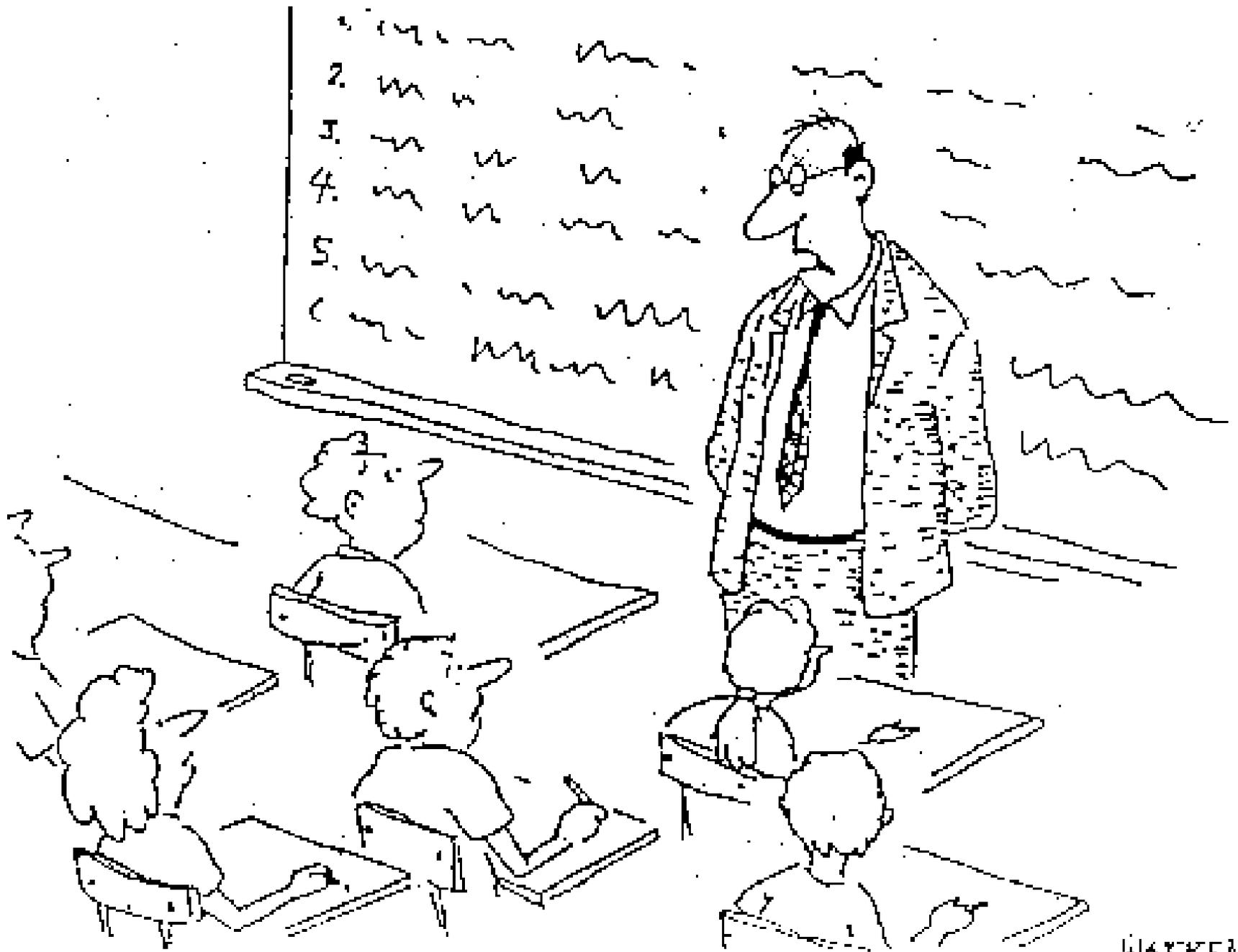
'I expect you all to be independent, innovative, critical thinkers, who will do exactly as I say.'