

The tertiary sector leads change

Tertiary institutions are responding to the need for sustainability practitioners with a range of new courses and adaptations.

In her role as a graduate sustainable development adviser at Rio Tinto, Chantelle Gibellini is sometimes surprised how much she takes for granted that is still not general practice in the wider community.

Chantelle completed a degree in sustainable development at Murdoch University in Western Australia in June this year and is one of five sustainable development officers in Rio's iron ore division.

'Some things, like recycling, for example, seem such a basic sustainability action to me that it's somewhat challenging to realise that not everybody understands its importance,' she says.

The projects Chantelle is working on include switching over the power supply of two offices to green power and coordinating the process of offsetting the division's flight emissions.

Ben Kent, who also completed a degree in sustainable development at Murdoch University, is now working for the WA Department of Planning and Infrastructure in its graduate program.

He says that finding a job wasn't difficult at all.

'There are so many opportunities in this area at the moment with many companies looking at issues such as corporate and



Monash University's Clayton campus now offers a Masters in Corporate Environmental and Sustainability Management. Monash University

social responsibility (CSR) and how they are going to tackle the new emissions trading scheme.

'What we were taught was a slant on sustainability and getting that environmental and social perspective into everything you do,' he points out.



Professor Brad Pettitt is Dean of the School of Sustainability at Murdoch University.

Murdoch University

Already, Ben has project managed an urban regeneration project in one of Perth's older suburbs and he is now working in state and regional policy.

As secretary of the Sustainability Practitioners Association in Perth, Ben has also noticed a large increase in the volume of enquiries from the general public wanting to become involved in sustainable development.

While Murdoch University has Australia's only undergraduate degree in sustainable development, where students qualify with either a BA or BSc, many universities now offer postgraduate degrees and cross disciplinary degrees involving sustainable development.

Dean of the School of Sustainability at Murdoch University, Professor Brad Pettitt, says about 60 students undertake the course each year, with enrolment numbers increasing.

The course includes core units in ecologically sustainable development and global and regional sustainability. Electives may come from areas such as regional planning or global development and aid. The degree also covers social issues.

'It doesn't matter how good your environmental management is, if you don't bring the community with you and have good participatory processes, you undermine the good work you are doing in that area,' Professor Pettitt explains.

He says most students find it very easy to get work, with most graduates being employed by state and local governments and the mining and resources sector.

'The job market has exploded in this area. I think it's going to keep growing and

becoming increasingly sophisticated,' says Professor Pettitt.

'People will need to specialise. The idea of sustainability officers will be overtaken with people with particular expertise in, for example, understanding carbon accounting, so companies will employ not just one person but multiple people. The degree is constantly evolving – we are always trying to think of what skills graduates are going to need when they come out.'

At Melbourne's Monash University, the School of Geography and Environmental Science offers a Masters degree in Corporate Environmental and Sustainability Management. Course Coordinator, Dr Wendy Stubbs, says most students are working in the corporate world and undertake the course part time.

The course has core units in corporate sustainability management, perspectives on sustainability, sustainability measurement and environmental responsibility, but other subjects can come from many areas.

'We try and design the program to suit what students are interested in,' says Dr Stubbs. Classes typically have between 30 and 60 people and numbers are increasing.

'Many graduates use the degree as a catalyst to change; they might stay in the same organisation but take on a sustainability role,' she says.

In semester 2, 2008, University of Southern Queensland (USQ) introduced a Bachelor of Accounting and Sustainable Business designed to produce accountants qualified to guide business through the process of becoming sustainable.

USQ Vice Chancellor, Professor Bill Lovegrove, says the degree focuses on the 'triple bottom line' of economic, social and environmental accountability to meet the public's expectations of corporate responsibility.

According to Professor Peter Best, Head of the university's School of Accounting, Economics and Finance, the degree has a small intake for this semester, but the first proper intake, commencing in 2009, is sizeable.

● **Robin Taylor**

More information:

Murdoch University, <http://www.murdoch.edu.au/Courses/Undergraduate-courses/Arts--Social-Sciences-and-Humanities/Sustainable-Development/>

Monash University, <http://arts.monash.edu.au/ges/pgrad/mcesm.php>

University of Southern Queensland: www.usq.edu.au/handbook/current/bus/BASB.html